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ABSTRACT

This document presents a report on the educational needs of homeless children in New York City. Data were analyzed from the following sources: (1) review of the current literature on the impact of homelessness on the physical and emotional well-being of children; (2) field-based interviews with 277 families in New York's shelters and hotels; and (3) an analysis of statistical data collected and maintained by the New York City Board of Education on 9,659 children in temporary housing. The following effects of homelessness were identified: (1) hunger and poor nutrition; (2) health problems and inadequate health care; (3) developmental delays; (4) psychological problems; and (5) denial of access to educational services. The following characteristics of the homeless were identified: (1) the average length of homelessness was 16 months; (2) the majority listed New York as their last permanent address; (3) most did not have a pattern of frequent moves prior to homelessness; and (4) many had lived with family or friends prior to requesting emergency shelter. The following effects of homelessness on education were identified: (1) placements in facilities are made without regard to community ties which results in a school transfer; (2) families are moved among facilities resulting in multiple school transfers; (3) many parents are not informed of their choices regarding educational placement; and (4) multiple moves increase school attendance problems, cause academic performance to suffer, and disrupt continuity of services. Recommendations for improvement are made in the following broad areas: (1) housing; (2) education for homeless children; and (3) education for relocated students. Statistical data are included on 17 tables. A list of 85 references and a 141-item bibliography are appended. (FMW)

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LEARNING IN LIMBO:

THE EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

"I think what she really needs is to stop going to a different school every month. She didn't have this 'learning disability' before we lost our home. What she really needs is a permanent home, and extra help with her reading and her math."

Mother of an 8-year-old child who has attended six schools in ten months

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and

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September 1989

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THE HOMELESS STORY

The way I feel about homeless people is that the President is treating us unfairly. If I was the President I would fix up all the buildings for all the homeless people to move in so we could have our own bathroom and wouldn't have to use the bathroom sink for dishes. We could use a kitchen to do our dishes and cook our food.

We don't like to live in a place where people don't give a damn about people. It is not fair for the rich people to look at us and smile, because if they were poor they would not like it either.

Antonia
Source: The Waterways Project

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Advocates for Children would also like to acknowledge the support and contributions of those who made valuable contributions to this project and without whose help this research could not have been completed. Special appreciation goes to the New York City Board of Education, especially to Michael Levine for providing access to important computerized data. For their compilation and analysis of data on the school performance and attendance of children in temporary housing, we thank Henry Solomon, Robert Tobias, and Augustus Olu-Hamilton.

Some poems were written by homeless women residents of the Regent Hotel as part of a poetry workshop introduced there by the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services and Poets in Public Service. Others were written by children from various shelters and hotels as part of the Waterways Project. We thank these organizations for permitting us to use this poetry.

We would also like to thank members of AFC's staff for their dedicated and outstanding work on this project. Special thanks to our research assistants, Lydia Trinidad and Andrea Williams, who spent hundreds of hours interviewing families and researching information contained in this report. For her keen insights into the problems encountered by homeless children and their families, as well as valuable input into the survey questionnaire, we thank Valerie Pekar. For her diligence in entering the data into the computer and typesetting, we thank Claire Jacobs. For editorial assistance, we thank Kathy Jarvis.

Many people, from a variety of sources too numerous to mention individually, assisted us in gaining access to the shelter and hotel residents whom we interviewed. To each of these individuals, for their invaluable participation and willingness to provide information, assistance and advice, we express our deep appreciation. For their helpful comments on an earlier version of this report, we thank Robert Altman from the New York City Council, Arthur Fried from Legal Aid Society, and Sarah Greenblatt from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. For donating the software to analyze the data, we thank SPSS Inc. Thanks to Paul Fusco for allowing us to use his photograph of a family shelter in the Bronx.

Most importantly, we thank the families who spent time talking to us and answering our questions in the hope that sharing their experiences with us would help to make a difference.

PREFACE

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. (AFC) was founded in 1970 to obtain equal educational opportunities, promote quality education services, and overcome school failure for New York City's 1,000,000 public school students. AFC's special mission is to represent the interests of students placed at highest risk of educational failure: those who suffer educational disadvantage because of racial discrimination, poverty, handicapping conditions, social or familial deprivation, or inadequate academic preparation. The core of AFC's program is its provision of assistance to individual students and their families to obtain appropriate quality public education services.

AFC's program is carried out by a multicultural, bilingual staff of attorneys, lay advocates, parent organizers, researchers, and volunteers, all of whom provide individual advocacy, training, research, and community organizing.

AFC became concerned with the education of homeless children over eight years ago and has consistently worked to address the obstacles they confront in obtaining and maintaining access to a high quality free public education. In this report, we focus on the educational ramifications of homelessness on these especially vulnerable students.

HOTEL LIFE

I live every day as best I can.
I have a great love for life.
In my life I've seen sorrow.

Through my children's eyes
I see the future like a rocket to the moon.
I see hope, I see so much good and beauty
Like a glowing light right
in the middle of my room.

When I think I'll never get out of here,
I see happiness for me,
I see another world, a better world.

I have learned to laugh through these eyes
And cry.

Gloria McDaniels
Source: The Women of the Regent Hotel

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UNTITLED

I am between two walls that trap me
and I have no way out.
I only see the light, that baffles me
and I can only cry
and ask God to enlighten me
with the light that can make me see
reality
so that I find my way out of this loneliness
that sadden me.
I see the darkness and I am not afraid
because I know that when I wake up, I'll see...

I know everything is so different
from when I was a child
because I knew then what laughing was.
I never knew what it was to cry for lack of love
or for a burned or broken toy.
Because nothing I wanted was ever missing.
Ever missing...

Everything is so different from when I was a child
Everything was beautiful.
Now I see different things.

I never knew what it was to be between two walls
to see just a small light
that blinds me
I don't see anything
I don't feel
anything
I am afraid that if I move
everything will be destroyed.

To start a new life
where there is no crying, no suffering
where everything is beauty and happiness and joy
like I have always wanted.

Antonia Garcia
Source: The Women in the Regent Hotel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 12,000 families, including 26,000 children, passed through New York City's emergency shelter system in 1988. On New Year's Day, 1989, there were 4,637 homeless families sheltered in 82 emergency housing facilities. These families consisted of 6,374 adults and 9,504 children under the age of 18 years. On average, families had been "in the system" for about a year. Of these 4,637 families, 408 (9%) were in city-operated Tier I shelters, 1,444 (31%) in not-for-profit Tier II shelters, and 2,785 (60%) in commercial hotels.

Homelessness affects the lives of families in many ways. In this report, Advocates for Children (AFC) focuses on the educational ramifications for school-age children. We explore this issue from three different angles:

I. A Review of the Current Research Literature on homeless families. This existing literature documents the impact of homelessness on the physical and emotional well-being of homeless children -- important determinants of one's ability to learn.

II. Field-Based Interviews with 277 families residing in New York City's shelters and hotels. Using a detailed survey instrument developed by AFC, which includes focused and closed-ended questions, we assessed family demographics, prior living arrangements, events leading to the request for emergency shelter, experiences with the shelter system, physical health, and the educational experiences of children between the ages of 6 and 19 years.

III. Analysis of Statistical Data of 9,659 children in temporary housing collected and maintained by the New York City Board of Education. This database was used to compare school attendance, academic performance, and other indices of school success of homeless children with overall citywide data.

KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

A review of the current research literature indicates that homelessness has been linked with a variety of negative effects on the well-being of homeless children. Of particular concern are: (1) hunger and poor nutrition; (2) increased health problems and inadequate health care; (3) developmental delays among pre-school age children; (4) increased frequency and intensity of anxiety and depression among school-age children; and (5) denial of access to legally mandated educational services.

1. HUNGER AND POOR NUTRITION

Hunger and poor nutrition are serious problems confronting homeless children. These, in turn, influence growth, physical health, mental health, the ability to concentrate on learning, and cognitive and behavioral functions.

* 49% of 2,112 individuals living in family shelters in New York City in 1987 who were eligible for food stamps were not receiving them. Many others who were eligible for a special meal allowance because they had no access to cooking or refrigeration facilities were not receiving it.

2. INCREASED HEALTH PROBLEMS AND INADEQUATE HEALTH CARE

The lack of adequate health care for homeless children begins with the paucity of prenatal care. Compounding this well-documented risk factor is the consistent finding that homeless children are at increased risk for delayed immunizations to protect them from fatal childhood illnesses; elevated lead levels; hospitalization; iron deficiencies; and a host of other maladies.

* Homeless women are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care than public housing residents and the general New York City population who delivered a baby during the same time period.

- Of 401 homeless pregnant women in New York City between 1982 and 1984:

  > 40% received no prenatal care at all, compared to 14.5% of public housing residents, and 9% of all New York City pregnant women.

  > 16.3% delivered a low birth weight baby, compared to 11.4% of women who lived in public housing, and 7.4% of all New York City women.

  > The rate of infant mortality among homeless women was more than double that of the general New York City population, and 1.5 times higher than public housing residents.

* Homeless children in New York City are more than twice as likely as poor permanently housed children to have delayed immunization schedules, elevated lead levels in their blood, spend time in the hospital, have iron deficiencies, and experience a host of other maladies.

- Of 265 homeless children treated at St. Luke's Roosevelt Pediatric Clinic:

  > 27% were late in their immunization schedule compared to 8% of low-income housed children attending the same outpatient clinic.

  > 4% had elevated blood levels compared to 1.7% of the housed comparison group.

  > Hospital admission rates were almost twice that of the housed comparison group (11.6/1000 compared to 7.5/1000).

- Of 90 homeless children treated at Bellevue Hospital:

  > 50% had iron deficiencies, compared to 25% of a comparison group of poor permanently housed children.

3. DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

Developmental delays among children age 5 years or younger are more prevalent among homeless children than among their permanently housed peers. The detrimental impact of homelessness on language ability is of particular concern. Despite these findings, the availability of quality day care services to provide both social and intellectual stimulation is grossly inadequate.

* 54% of homeless pre-schoolers manifested a developmental delay (primarily language) compared to 16% of housed pre-schoolers from low socio-economic backgrounds.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

The psychological impact of homelessness on children is manifested by a greater prevalence and intensity of anxiety, depression, and behavioral disturbances. These psychological factors are well-documented as interfering with one's capacity to learn.

* Homeless children scored significantly higher on the Children's Depression Inventory than a comparison group of poor permanently housed children.

* Anxiety levels among homeless children have been found to occur at three times the rate as a comparison group of poor permanently housed children.

* Behavioral disturbances have been found to be more frequent among homeless children than among comparison groups of permanently housed children.

5. DENIAL OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Five major barriers have been identified as confronting homeless children in their attempts to gain access to equal educational services: (1) residency requirements; (2) inability to obtain school records; (3) special education requirements; (4) guardianship requirements;

and (5) lack of transportation.

New York City was the first school district in the nation to enact regulations to remove educational access barriers confronting homeless children. Several of the New York City guidelines, including the requirement that children may enroll in either the local or former school, were later, in some form, adopted nationally in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

Existing research on homelessness and education focuses on homeless children's access to educational services. Unfortunately, this literature tends to be primarily descriptive with little, if any, empirical data on what happens to homeless children once they are enrolled in school. This research was designed to address the absence of research in this area.

KEY FINDINGS - AFC'S FIELD-BASED SAMPLE AND THEIR EXPERIENCES

Our field-based study involved interviews with 277 families from a variety of Tier I and Tier II shelters and commercial hotels. The average length of time families had been homeless was 16 months; 47% had been homeless for more than one year and 18% for more than two years.

Contrary to popular opinion and stereotypes, the vast majority of AFC's survey respondents listed New York City as the location of their previous permanent residence; most did not have a pattern of frequent moves prior to their homelessness; and many had "doubled up" with family or friends prior to requesting emergency shelter.

* 88% (244) lived in New York City immediately prior to becoming homeless.
* 90% (250) had lived in their last permanent residence for at least one year.
* 56% (154) did <u>not</u> enter the system immediately after losing their prior permanent home. Only when they had no one left to turn to did they seek emergency shelter.

KEY FINDINGS - THE IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON EDUCATION

New York City Board of Education (BOE) regulations address each of the educational barriers previously identified as confronting homeless children in their attempts to gain access to equal educational services. In addition, New York State Social Services regulations stipulate that placement referrals of homeless families "must be made in light of the community ties and educational needs of the family and the children in the family."

In spite of progress at the legislative and policy levels, the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) continues to place families in shelters and hotels without regard to community ties or educational needs. Their practice of placing families in a different borough than their last permanent home, followed by a constant shuttling back and forth from one facility to another, and often from one borough to another, is extremely disruptive to the education of homeless children. Being bounced from one facility to another frequently results in multiple school transfers and, in turn, has a detrimental impact on school attendance and academic performance.

The impact of homelessness on the ability to be educated is illustrated through data obtained from our field-based interviews as well as from the Board of Education's database on students in temporary housing.

THE STUDENTS - FIELD-BASED SAMPLE

* There were 427 children between the ages of 6 and 19 years currently living with their parent(s).

* Of the 427 children living with their parent(s), 390 (91%) were currently enrolled in school; 14 had dropped out; 3 had graduated; and 20 were awaiting placement and/or transfer.

* Of the 390 children currently enrolled in school: 51% are male; the median age is 9.5 years; and 90% are in grades K through 8.

THE STUDENTS - BOARD OF EDUCATION DATABASE

* 9,659 school-age homeless children were known to the New York City Board of Education between September 1987 and May 1988.

* 68.5% (6,613) were living in a commercial hotel when first identified by the Board of Education; 21.4% (2,068) were in Tier II shelters; and 10.1% (978) were in Tier I shelters.

IN NEW YORK CITY, PLACEMENTS IN SHELTERS AND HOTELS ARE MADE WITHOUT REGARD TO COMMUNITY TIES

* 71% (174) of the 244 families interviewed by AFC who lived in New York City before becoming homeless are sheltered in a different borough than their last permanent home.

DISREGARDING COMMUNITY TIES GENERALLY RESULTS IN A SCHOOL TRANSFER

* 76% (296) of the 390 school-age children of the families interviewed by AFC have transferred to a different school at least once since becoming homeless, 33% (128) at least twice, and 11% (42) three or more times.

FAMILIES ARE GENERALLY "BOUNCED" FROM ONE FACILITY TO ANOTHER

* 66% (182) of the 277 families interviewed by AFC have been in at least two shelters; 29% (80) have been in at least four, and 10% (27) have been in seven or more.

* Length of time in the shelter system is associated with bouncing from shelter to shelter: 26% of those in the system for 6 months or less have been in at least three different facilities, compared to 66% of those in the system for more than 2 years.

"BOUNCING" BETWEEN FACILITIES RESULTS IN MULTIPLE SCHOOL TRANSFERS

* The number of schools attended is significantly influenced by the number of shelters or hotels children have been in. For example, 13% (18) of the 142 children who have been in no other shelter have transferred schools two or more times, compared to 52% (74) of the 142 children who have been in three or more different facilities.

MANY PARENTS ARE NOT INFORMED OF THEIR CHOICES REGARDING EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT

* In spite of legal entitlements and repeated attempts at improving communication, the parents of 119 of the 363 children (33%) who should have been given a choice of whether their child would attend school in the local or former area were not told about their right to choose.

* The decision as to whether to retain children in their former school or transfer them to local schools was significantly influenced by whether or not they were informed that they had a choice. Overall, 58% (142) of the 244 children whose parents had been given a choice were attending the local school, compared to 100% of the 119 children whose parents had not been given a choice.

* Parents were often unaware that their children would receive free transportation passes if they continued to attend their former school. Many parents were also unaware of the existence of income maintenance procedures to provide carfare for parents to escort their children to and from school. In fact, 53% (75) of the 142 children who had been transferred to the local school, despite their parent being offered a choice, were transferred because their parent could not afford the transportation cost, and were not aware that the BOE and/or HRA would cover these expenses.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DETERIORATES

* According to Board of Education data on the school attendance of 6,142 students:

  - The average daily attendance rate for homeless students in elementary schools is 74% compared with 89% of all New York City elementary school students.

  - The average attendance rate for homeless junior high school students is 64% compared with 86% citywide.

  - Homeless high school students are present 51% of the time versus 84% citywide.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS INCREASE WITH "BOUNCING" BETWEEN FACILITIES

* The multiple moves associated with homelessness contribute to poorer school attendance. Our field-based data indicates that students missed, on average, 5 days in school when they moved into their current facility. Overall, 19% (74) missed 1-2 days; 23% (88) missed 3-5 days; and 20% (78) missed 10 days or more.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE SUFFERS

Academic performance was assessed using three general indices: (1) reading achievement; (2) mathematics achievement; and (3) holdover rates.

* According to Board of Education statistics:

  - Only 42% of the 3,805 homeless students (grades 3 through 10) who took the Degrees of Reading Power test (DRP) in May, 1988 scored at or above grade level, compared to 68% of all New York City students.

  - These findings remain consistent when looked at by select school districts:

    District 1: 36% vs. 57% scored at or above grade level
    District 2: 40% vs. 74% scored at or above grade level
    District 15: 41% vs. 68% scored at or above grade level

  - Only 28% of the 4,203 students (grades 2 through 8) who took the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) in the Spring of 1988 scored at or above grade level, compared to 57% of all New York City students.

  - These findings remain consistent when looked at by select school districts:

    District 1: 22% vs. 49% scored at or above grade level
    District 2: 24% vs. 70% scored at or above grade level
    District 15: 23% vs. 60% scored at or above grade level

* According to our field-based survey:

  - Homeless children are held over at double the rate of New York City students in general; 15% (59) of the 390 children are currently repeating a grade, compared to a 7% holdover rate for all New York City students.

CONTINUITY OF SERVICES IS DISRUPTED

* Of the 97 children in our field-based survey who were receiving special services (i.e. remedial assistance, bilingual services, gifted and talented program) prior to their loss of permanent housing, only 52 (54%) are receiving them now.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Advocates for Children strongly recommend that the Board of Education, Human Resources Administration, and the Mayor of New York City consider the following recommendations as an attempt to address the educational needs of homeless children. Our recommendations fall into three broad categories: (1) housing issues; (2) educational issues for homeless students; and (3) educational issues for relocating students.

1. HOUSING ISSUES

One important lesson learned from this research project is that in order for children to succeed in school, their families need to have a permanent home and access to advocacy services to prevent them from losing their home. Therefore, before turning to more specific educational service needs of homeless students, we make the following recommendations.

A LONG-TERM PLAN FOR PERMANENT HOUSING

* The City and State of New York must address the major barrier to the education of homeless students - poverty and an inadequate supply of affordable housing. Efforts to increase the availability of low-income and affordable housing must receive highest priority.

* The City and State of New York must decrease the current 12-month mandatory wait before homeless families are eligible for relocation to permanent housing.

* The Federal government also has an important role to play in the provision of affordable housing. We recommend that they begin to do so by returning to the pre-1981 appropriations for housing programs.

PREVENT FAMILIES FROM LOSING THEIR HOMES

* Increase the current maximum public assistance rental allowance of $286 per month for a family of three ($312 for a family of four) so that it realistically addresses the current housing market, and enables poor New Yorkers to afford decent housing.

* Expand resources such as Legal Aid assistance, which currently provides counsel to less than 10% of low-income persons threatened with eviction, to assure free or low cost legal assistance to all such persons.

* Reduce the frequency and reasons for excessive social services case closings, which are often the cause of families being evicted from their homes.

* Preserve existing housing by improving the maintenance of occupied low-income stock, aggressive enforcement of housing maintenance codes, and ensuring that landlords make the required repairs.

* Cease development policies that force thousands of poor households from their homes and communities.

2. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS

The following recommendations deal with the more specific educational issues affecting homeless children. In this section, we focus on short-term educational needs of children who are living in emergency housing facilities and the immediate steps that need to be taken by New York City to address these needs. In the next section, we will turn our attention to the specific educational needs of homeless students as they are relocated into permanent housing.

Our recommendations broadly fall into two major categories: (1) collection and dissemination of data, and (2) the provision of services. We will first offer recommendations for the Human Resources Administration (HRA), and then for the Board of Education (BOE). In most cases, the implementation of both sets of recommendations will require full cooperation and coordination between these two city agencies. In other cases, Board of Education recommendations would not be necessary if adequate preventive steps were taken by the Human Resources Administration.

A) HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

THE SHELTERS

* Under no circumstances should HRA place families with children in congregate shelters, or short-stay hotels. They provide neither humane nor acceptable shelter for families. The only temporary shelter environment which is suitable for families with children are transitional apartments, which contain individual cooking, dining and bathroom facilities.

INITIAL PLACEMENT OF HOMELESS FAMILIES

* Pursuant to the official regulations of the State Department of Social Services, Title 18, NYCRR (Part 900,7a), temporary shelter referrals by HRA must be made in light of the community ties and educational needs of the family. We recommend that HRA comply with these regulations and place families in or near their own communities upon becoming homeless, thus facilitating continuity in school.

BOUNCING BETWEEN FACILITIES

* HRA must immediately be prohibited from bouncing families between facilities, so frequently associated with educational disruption, during the school year. This should only be permitted at the request of, or with the agreement of, the family.

DIET AND NUTRITION

* HRA must undertake an immediate review of the proportion of homeless families currently sheltered in commercial hotels who are not receiving the restaurant allowance to which they are entitled.

* Food service in facilities with congregate dining should meet the needs of students who remain in their former schools. To prevent students from having to choose between on-time arrival at school or eating breakfast, there should be an early breakfast provided at 6.30am/or a take-away meal which could be consumed on the way. In addition, after-school snacks should be provided.

INCREASED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

* HRA must ensure that all pregnant women have access to adequate prenatal and well-baby care.

* HRA must take immediate steps to rectify the lack of immunization and the excessive health problems of homeless children.

B) BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

* Quality pre-school enrichment programs must be made available on a year-round basis to all homeless pre-schoolers to prevent and remediate developmental delays.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

* After-school programs and supportive services need to be developed to help children deal with the increased anxiety and depression associated with homelessness. Additional support and guidance services are needed in the schools to provide assistance to these students. In addition, existing community community based organizations need to be called upon to develop and/or expand after-school programs to address these needs. These programs must be provided in a confidential and non-discriminatory manner.

ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

* School personnel must be physically present on-site at each shelter/hotel, and not merely scheduled to visit, in order to assist families maintain the continuity of their children's education.

* Parents of school-age children must be contacted by Board of Education personnel within 24 hours of entering the shelter system in order to maintain continuity of educational services.

* Parents must be informed, in their primary language, of their right to either keep their children in their former schools or to transfer them to local schools. When a transfer to a local school is elected, school records must be delivered to the receiving school immediately.

* The educational needs of bilingual students must be identified promptly when children enter new schools. Appropriate services must be provided within 48 hours.

* The educational needs of students requiring special education services must be identified promptly upon entry to the homeless system. For these children, the continuity of education is especially important.

TRANSPORTATION

* Parents must be informed, in their primary language, that (a) the Board of Education will supply transportation passes for their children should they elect to remain in their former schools, and (b) Human Resources Administration (Income Maintenance Unit) will reimburse parents for the actual cost of transporting their children to and from school.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

* The Board of Education should develop programs geared to empower homeless parents. Special attention needs to be paid to the value of participation in the education of their children. In addition, strategies must be developed that would encourage the participation of uninvolved parents.

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

* The Board of Education must continue to enhance their monitoring of the school attendance of homeless children, with special attention being paid to the attendance profile of high school students. Specific reasons for absences must be identified and steps taken to remove whatever obstacles are identified. A comprehensive report of findings must be made available on a quarterly basis.

IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

* Remediation and tutoring in basic skills must be provided in a non-discriminatory manner to all homeless children who need it. Thus, additional staff needs to be assigned to schools with a large proportion of homeless students to provide opportunities for homogeneous small group instruction; the number of guidance counselors needs to be increased to provide support services to those students who require it; and class size needs to be reduced to provide enhanced learning opportunities.

* After-school programs, including transportation, should be made available for all homeless children, including those who continue to attend school in their former district. These programs must provide remediation and tutoring in basic skills, homework assistance, and recreational opportunities which build upon classroom instruction. Special programs, designed to build competencies in academic, social, affective, and health areas, must be implemented and made available throughout the entire year.

IMPROVE THE DATABASE ON STUDENTS IN TEMPORARY HOUSING

* The BOE must expand their database on students in temporary housing to include the special education classification of all homeless students requiring special educational services. This is currently being done only for those students in special education programs for students with mild to moderate educationally handicapping conditions (MIS Programs) or those in "low incidence" programs for students with severe handicapping conditions (SIE or Citywide Programs).

* The BOE must be more diligent in their efforts to identify students as they enter the shelter system, identify their educational needs, and monitor the extent to which these needs are being addressed. Information should be collected that would address the following research questions: the number of times children are transferred to different schools and the reason for each transfer; dropout rates and their relationship to length of time homeless; the academic skills of pre-schoolers; the impact of homelessness on holdover rates; proportion requiring special services (e.g. LEP, Resource Room, Gifted and AIDP Programs), and suspension rates. This information could then be used to guide program development and preventive interventions.

FUNDING

* Per capita funding for hotel/shelter educational services should continue at the 1988-1989 rates. These rates of $468 for every child in a temporary housing facility in the district, plus $675 for every child on the district's register, are necessary to maintain educational services at least at their current levels.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

* Educational programs must be evaluated in a timely manner. The evaluations for both the 1987-1988 and 1988-1989 school years must be completed, and results released to each school district and others who request this information, within the next 60 days. Future plans for such evaluations must come with a timeline for completion (e.g. 90 days).

3. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FOR RELOCATING STUDENTS

Since the Mayor's announcement of a plan to close the "welfare" hotels throughout the City, the emphasis has been on expediting placement of homeless families into permanent housing. While we applaud these efforts, we feel that insufficient attention has been paid to the needs of families upon relocation.

In order to support families in their attempts at independent living in their new communities, Advocates for Children view the continuity of services as an essential and critical component of this process. In this section, we will focus primarily on the educational needs of relocated students. Our recommendations are designed to ensure the continuity of educational services and the coordination of assistance so desperately needed by these vulnerable children.

A) HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

* HRA must place families in or near the communities where their last permanent home was located, except at the request of or with the agreement of the family, thus facilitating the rebuilding of community ties and supports.

* HRA should ensure that every family who is relocated to permanent housing is visited within five days. Since this commitment is not currently being met, additional staff need to be assigned to this team. These workers should be responsible for coordinating available supportive services which are vital for successful readjustment to the community. These include home visits, counseling, advocacy, and information referral.

COORDINATE THE RELOCATION PROCESS WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

* Concrete data must be provided, in a timely manner, by HRA to the BOE on the projected numbers of homeless families who will be relocated into permanent housing; the street addresses where apartments will be located; and the approximate dates that these families are expected to be relocated. This information will be provided for all types of available housing (e.g. EARP; DAMP; SIP; OD; CMI; NYCHA; IN-REM; and DHCR apts).

* For each of the above types of available housing, as well as private apartments, HRA must inform the BOE of the new address within 24 hours of a lease being signed by a family from a temporary housing facility. This information is imperative for the BOE to coordinate the relocation process with receiving school districts.

COORDINATE THE RELOCATION PROCESS WITH COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS

* HRA must engage community based organizations to provide support services to families as they are relocated. These services should include counseling, guidance, treatment on demand for substance abuse, and health care. Community based organizations, especially those with facilities or community centers in the neighborhoods to which families are being relocated, could serve as important resources for families as they move.

TRANSPORTATION EXPENSES

* HRA should be required to continue to reimburse parents who elect to maintain their children in their former schools for expenses incurred in escorting them to and from school, at least through the end of the school year after the family has moved to permanent housing.

B) BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

* The responsibility for identifying, registering, and ensuring the attendance of homeless students as they are relocated into permanent housing belongs with the Board of Education and should remain under their control. HRA personnel should not be used for these important follow-up services.

* Workers must be permanently stationed at each facility in the process of closing to facilitate the continuity of educational services as families are relocated into permanent housing.

* Board of Education staff must ensure that all families moving into permanent housing (including those who are not part of a hotel closing) are visited by BOE personnel prior to their move. The purpose of this visit would be to offer families a choice of sending their children to the local or former schools (including transportation issues).

COORDINATE THE RELOCATION PROCESS WITH RECEIVING DISTRICTS

* The BOE must inform receiving school districts of the number of homeless students who will be relocated into their district, as well as the anticipated dates, in sufficient time to enable them to prepare for their arrival.

* The BOE must develop specific plans within the school districts to which the children will be transferred, including rezoning within districts to equalize utilization; capping of class size in schools with a large influx of resettled children; and provision of educational and related services to overcome educational deficits.

* The BOE must inform receiving school districts of the special needs of the children moving into their districts. For example, receiving districts need to be aware of how many children will require special educational services to determine the adequacy of their staffing levels. Second, knowing what type of programs these special education students are coming from is necessary to ensure the continuity of educational services and prevent them from being placed in the wrong programs.

* The BOE should focus on linking school personnel in the receiving school districts with workers in school districts with experience serving large numbers of homeless students. These people could serve as valuable resources if used as consultants to receiving districts.

* The BOE must implement staff development programs to help school personnel in receiving districts understand the dynamics of homelessness, and understand the special needs of relocated students as well as their strengths, talents, and the characteristics they share with other children in the community.

SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

* Some students, when they move into permanent housing, will be in the midst of being evaluated for special education. For these children, the continuity of education is especially important. The BOE must ensure that these children are placed in appropriate programs within five school days.

* When children with special educational needs are relocated into permanent housing and elect to continue attending their former schools, transportation problems should be resolved within three school days.

C) RECEIVING SCHOOL DISTRICTS' RESPONSIBILITIES:

* Receiving school districts need to develop a concrete plan outlining how they will meet the educational needs of students who are relocating into their districts. These plans should identify how they are going to deal with both those students who will live and attend school in the same district, as well as resettled children who choose to attend their former schools. This plan should (1) outline what services will be available to both groups of children when they move (e.g. remediation programs, tutoring, homework assistance, extracurricular activities); and (2) include the number of additional staff who will need to be hired (e.g. guidance counselors) to deal with these added responsibilities.

* Within 24 hours of being notified of a family being relocated into their district, receiving schools must notify the family that they need to register their children in school and provide appropriate details.

* Within 24 hours of registration, receiving school districts must arrange for transportation; request school records; and identify and provide for necessary support services.

D) SENDING SCHOOL DISTRICTS' RESPONSIBILITIES:

* Sending schools must coordinate the relocation process with receiving schools and ensure that records are forwarded in a timely manner. In addition they must notify receiving district in the event that records of relocated students have not been requested.

In conclusion, Advocates for Children suggest that adoption of these recommendations will be a good start towards educational parity for homeless children.

SCHOOL

The reason for me not going to school is that I stopped going to school when my mother moved to the Martinique Hotel. I went to school every day until I moved to the Martinique. I was in the 7th grade when I stopped going.

I love my school very much but I don't want to keep going back to the same grade. Mrs. Fulton my 7th grade Dean told me when my attendance started getting bad that she thought I needed to come to school more often. But my transportation was a distance and I would get to my school very late and so I kind of stopped going. And I really want to go to school this year ... but I wouldn't want to do the 7th grade another year.

Deborah Monique
Source: The Waterways Project

I. INTRODUCTION

The "economic boom" of the 1980's has been accompanied by a transformation in the character of the homeless population and an unprecedented rise in the number of homeless families with children in the United States. This changed face contrasts with the historic profile of homelessness - a population primarily consisting of older men, many of whom were chronic alcoholics. It also differs from the 1970's image of a homeless population of younger men and women, many of whom had been released from state psychiatric institutions without sufficient support services to allow successful integration into their communities. Families with children are currently the fastest growing group among the homeless population and account for over 30% of the three million homeless persons in the United States.[1]

The rise in family homelessness is generally attributed to social and economic factors beyond the control of the individual. These include the movement of the federal government out of the low-income housing market; the expiration of federal contracts for subsidized housing; the ever-shrinking supply of affordable private housing due to redevelopment, condominium conversion, and abandonment; the national growth in poverty; unemployment or underemployment; and cutbacks in federal entitlement programs.[2] In 1986, a 20-member panel appointed by Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins to study the reasons for the drastic increase in the number of homeless families concluded:[3]

> "The problems underlying the crisis in family homelessness are escalating poverty and a shortage of low-income housing. Housing production, rather than expansion of the emergency shelter system, is the long-term solution."

A year later, in discussing the role of the State, New York Governor, Mario Cuomo, echoed that finding:[4]

"Homelessness today is not primarily the result of personal fault or failure, but of larger misfortunes over which people have very little control.... Many have worked; most have endured much hardship before becoming homeless; and comparatively few have elected dependency as a way of life."

FAMILY IN NEED

Homeless people
Are people with blues,
Living their problems
In one little room,
Children live
In darkness and with secrets,
When wanting to talk,
Sometimes they're speechless.
Parents are trying
For a better way
While some are distracted
And here to stay.
Giving up hope and
Stopping their trying,
More people are homeless,
More children are crying

Bill
Source: The Waterways Project

II. THE NEW YORK CITY CONTEXT

THE FAMILIES

On an average night in 1970, there were 1,100 homeless families in emergency transitional facilities in New York City. On New Year's Day, 1989, there were 4,637 families, including 6,374 adults and 9,504 children under age 18.[5] However, a total of approximately 12,000 families, including 26,000 children, had passed through the emergency shelter system in New York City at some point during the prior year.[6]

These families do not include the women in the "single shelter system" or their children who live elsewhere. As many as 46% of the women in adult shelters have dependent children living elsewhere - some staying with relatives, others in foster care.[7] Nor does it include the children of families in the "family shelter system" who are not currently staying with their parent(s). Finally, it excludes the growing numbers of homeless youth who no longer live with their families due to their lack of resources, ability, or willingness to support them.[8] The New York State Department of Education estimates that there were more than 20,000 homeless youth in New York State in 1988.[9] Covenant House estimates that half of them were in New York City.

In New York City, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) is the public agency responsible for sheltering and providing social services to the homeless. In 1986, HRA released a "profile of homeless families" based on a one day "snapshot" of families at the Martinique Hotel and the Forbell Street Shelter:[10]

* 86% are headed by women.
* The average mother's age is 27.
* 11.3% of the parents are under the age of 21 years.

* The average family has 2.3 children whose average age is 6.

* 50% of the children are below the age of five; 10% are under 1 year.

* 95% are African-American or Latino/Hispanic.

* 83% are recipients of public assistance.

* 73% receive food stamps.

* 18% are unable to keep their family together during their homelessness.

* 92% resided in New York City for at least one year prior to requesting emergency shelter.

* 61% are life-long New York residents.

* 33% of the heads of households are high-school graduates.

* 50% of the heads of households held a full-time job at some point prior to becoming homeless.

As the number of homeless families increased, the average length of stay in "temporary" housing facilities also increased. In 1981, the average length of stay was two months; in October, 1984 it was 7.8 months;[11] and by December, 1988, it was almost one year (357 days).[12] Further, on New Year's Eve, 1988, 39% of the families had been in the emergency housing system for more than one year; and 10% had been there for more than two years.

The families accounted for by HRA represent approximately 64% of the "documented" homeless population in New York City.[13] The remaining 36% of those who are "documented" are in the "single shelter system." The undocumented homeless families -- those who have not entered the shelter system and are temporarily living with friends and relatives in abandoned buildings, in subways, in train stations, and in our parks and on our streets -- are

not part of anyone's statistics or database. Their numbers are conservatively estimated at 100,000 in New York City.[14]

Families generally exhaust a variety of other housing arrangements before seeking emergency shelter. The most common route is to "double up" with family or friends temporarily. Reports of families "doubling up" prior to seeking emergency shelter range from 57%[15] to 70%.[16] By the time homeless families present themselves at the Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU) for shelter, their personal and family resources are exhausted, and they have no one left to turn to.

THE SHELTERS

On New Year's Day, 1989, 4,637 families were sheltered in 82 facilities in New York City: 45% (2,078) in Manhattan, 22% (1,037) in Brooklyn, 18% (849) in Queens, 8% (379) in the Bronx, and 6% (292) in Staten Island.[17] While the majority of families come from Brooklyn or the Bronx, most are assigned to facilities in Manhattan. Families are sheltered in three different types of facilities: Tier I shelters, Tier II shelters, and commercial hotels. The distribution of families sheltered by borough and type of facility is presented in Table 1.

In addition to these 82 facilities, up to 30 families per night have been sheltered in five overnight emergency shelters. These facilities - which provide no services whatsoever to homeless families - are used to shelter families for no more than one night, and only as a last resort when no other options are available.[18]

Tier I Shelters

Tier I shelters, which accommodated 406 families with 507 children on January 1, are city-operated barracks-type facilities with communal sleeping, bathing, and dining

TABLE 1

Families in Emergency Housing Facilities in New York City New Year's Day, 1989[1]

BOROUGH	Number of Facilities	Number of Families Sheltered	Percentage of Families
Manhattan			
Tier I	2	209	
Tier II	11	445	
Hotels	13	1424	
TOTAL	26	2078	44.8%
Brooklyn			
Tier I	2	147	
Tier II	14	403	
Hotels	7	487	
TOTAL	23	1037	22.4%
Queens			
Tier I	0	0	
Tier II	4	235	
Hotels	13	614	
TOTAL	17	849	18.3%
Bronx			
Tier I	1	50	
Tier II	5	206	
Hotels	5	123	
TOTAL	11	379	8.2%
Staten Island			
Tier I	0	0	
Tier II	2	155	
Hotels	3	137	
TOTAL	5	292	6.3%
CITY TOTALS			
Tier I	5	406	8.8%
Tier II	36	1444	31.1%
Hotels	41	2785	60.1%
TOTAL	82	4637[2]	100.0%

[1]**Source:** Homeless Family Census, published by the City of New York Human Resources Administration, Crisis Intervention Services (1988, December 31).

[2]Total includes two families from five overnight shelters.

accommodations for both children and adults. One resident describes her living situation in the following statement:[19]

> "The shelter is bunk by bunk ... cots without mattresses, not as good as lawn furniture, lined up two feet apart. Babies crying ... little newborn babies crying all night. I pushed toilet paper so far down in my ears I had to go to the doctor with an infection. Then you go to the welfare office, and they send you back here. It's worse than being in jail. There's a reason for that. They're still holding those stupid precepts that if you give people something, they'll not want to work ... you can provide better for a dog than a human child in this society."

Unless a documented medical condition dictates otherwise, the first step into the emergency housing system is generally a Tier I shelter. Originally intended for a maximum stay of 21 days, families often stay for several months, and some for over a year. According to pediatrician Karen Benker, in testimony before the City Council in January 1989 on Tier I facilities:[20]

> "The shelters are long-stay, not short-stay institutions. Families in the shelters are not new entrants to the system, but are long-term victims of bouncing between shelters and hotels with a subsequent serious disruption in their ability to function in terms of jobs, education, maintenance of public assistance entitlements, and medical care ... the congregate environment is a nightmare of lack of privacy, bad food, noise, chaos, danger, and sleeplessness."

Ironically, the barracks-type Tier I facilities are more expensive than either Tier II shelters or commercial hotels: it cost $170 per day ($62,196 per annum) to shelter a family at the East Third Street Shelter during the month of July 1988.[21]

Tier II Shelters

On January 1, 1989, 1,444 families with 3,179 children were sheltered in 36 Tier II facilities in New York City which are operated by not-for-profit agencies. They provide families with private sleeping quarters, a range of services and, in most cases, private kitchens and bathrooms.

Commercial Hotels

The remaining 2,785 families "in the system" on January 1, 1989 and their 5,818 children were sheltered in 41 privately-operated commercial hotels, located primarily in Manhattan and Queens. While some hotels have no restrictions on length of stay, others restrict families to a maximum of 28 days. Restricting the amount of time a family can stay prevents occupants from acquiring tenants' rights. These rights would provide them with legal protection from being evicted. The use of short-stay hotels is a major contributing factor to families being bounced from one hotel to another for months on end.

Families living in hotels have one or two rooms and a private or shared bathroom. They typically have no cooking facilities, refrigerators or telephones. Rooms are typically small, heat and hot water often scarce, electrical wiring sometimes faulty, elevators frequently inoperative, and ventilation all too often inadequate. In spite of the inadequacy of the accommodations, the cost of warehousing families in these barely habitable hotels is astronomical: the per diem rate of the most expensive hotel, the Bayview in Brooklyn, is $105 per family -- $38,325 per year.[22]

THE SERVICES

On July 14, 1986, the New York State Department of Social Services filed emergency regulations with the Secretary of State regarding reimbursement to Tier I and Tier II facilities for providing shelter to homeless families. On this date, "Part 900 Shelter for Families" was added to the Official Regulations of the State Department of Social Services, Title 18, NYCRR.[23]

Part 900 sets requirements and standards for Tier I and Tier II shelters and makes non-compliance with these requirements and standards grounds for denial of reimbursement. According to these regulations, shelters are required to provide access to three nutritional

meals a day, supervision, a preliminary needs assessment, and health services or referrals. In addition, Tier II facilities must provide permanent housing preparation services (e.g. counseling, assistance in obtaining housing, securing supportive and mental health services, and employment); recreational services; information and referral services; and child care services.

A recent report by Citizens Committee for Children documents repeated violations of these provisions at Tier I facilities, and concludes that, "The environment is essentially an affront to personal dignity and violates the integrity of family life."[24] Although State inspections have also verified that Tier I shelters routinely fail to provide required services, no remedial action has been taken by either state or city officials.[25]

Unlike Tier I and Tier II shelters, hotel operators are not required to provide anything other than sanitation and maintenance services. These services, however, frequently range from deficient to nonexistent.[26] For example, while conducting a study at the recently closed Martinique Hotel in New York City, Simpson, Kilduff, & Blewett found that:[27]

> "The halls, stairwells and trash rooms are filthy and rats and roaches infest tenant quarters. Members of the maintenance staff often try to exact sexual favors in exchange for services. Rooms are not secure. Muggings take place on elevators and in stairwells. There are no washing machines or dryers on the hotel premises."

Several sections of the Part 900 Social Services Regulations require the Commissioner of Social Services to take cognizance of the educational needs of homeless students -- but only those who are living in Tier I and Tier II facilities. Within two days of admission to the emergency shelter system, Part 900.10b requires Tier I facilities to consider the most appropriate temporary placement for the family:

"An evaluation shall also be made of the educational needs, community ties, and other needs of the family in order to determine the most appropriate temporary placement for the family."

Within 21 days of admission into the system, Part 900.7a requires Tier I shelters to transfer families to Tier II facilities or hotels:

"Such referral must be made to the best available setting, based on the availability of space and the needs of the family as determined by the local social services district. Any referral must be made in light of the community ties and educational needs of the family and the children in the family."

Part 900.3b requires each Tier I and Tier II facility to have an approved operational plan which, among other requirements, provides the following information:

"Arrangements for ensuring school attendance by school-age children residing in the facility, including any necessary transportation arrangements; if transportation is to be provided, written evidence of the arrangement for such transportation must be included."

Finally, Part 900.11a requires shelters to verify that each school-age child in his/her shelter departs for school each day:

"...maintaining a list of school-age residents currently residing in the facility and the location of the school each child attends; the facility must verify departure for school on a daily basis during the school year."

LOOKING AHEAD

The Federal government threatened to cut $70 million in New York City funds for emergency shelter of homeless families in August, 1988, unless HRA stopped using commercial hotels for emergency shelter. The City immediately announced a 2-year plan to move all homeless families out of hotels by July, 1990. The plan is to move families who had

been in the system for at least 12 months into permanent housing, and the remainder into Tier II shelters. To accommodate the growing reliance on Tier II shelters, the City is increasing the number of units. HRA's progress report on the five-year plan for housing and assisting homeless families, issued in February, 1989, illustrates how the number of available Tier II units will increase from 1,956 in June, 1989 to 4,321 in June, 1992.[28] At the end of June 1992, the five-year plan projects that there will be 3,467 families living in emergency housing facilities.

An article in The New York Times on March 3, 1989 entitled "New York Pulling Out of 13 More Welfare Hotels," as well as other media coverage of events, could easily lead one to believe that the problem of family homelessness is on the way out. Unfortunately, the crisis is far from over. While the city has made much progress in their endeavors to move families out of the hotels, families continue to enter the system on a daily basis. According to the Human Resources Administration's monthly report for May 1989, 919 families moved out of the system during the month, while 676 moved in. Similarly, during the month of June, 997 families moved out, while 830 moved in.

A second issue pertains to the future of homeless families who are being relocated into permanent housing. A recent City Council report, "What's Next?," presents findings from a recent survey of homeless families relocated to permanent housing from the Martinique hotel.[29]

* Of the 222 surveys sent to relocated families, using names and addresses supplied by the Human Resources Administration, 35 (16%) were returned by the Post Office because no such person or street address existed.

* Residents in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) housing are relatively pleased with their placements, while residents in Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) housing report poor to terrible conditions.

* **Of the 36 respondents residing in apartments received from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), 24 (66%) were dissatisfied with their living conditions; 12 (33%) stated that nobody had visited them to discuss their children's education; and 14 (39%) indicated that their public assistance benefits had been interrupted following relocation.**

These findings suggest the services may not be following relocated families as they move out of the hotels. Increased efforts must be made to assure appropriate planning towards the provision of necessary services upon relocation -- including educational services designed to mitigate the detrimental consequences of having been homeless.

MY DREAM

To wake up from this
temporary nightmare

Returning to a normal
(whatever that is)
life for my family.

Especially for my children
to have freedom,
to romp as they did before
in our backyard
and once again enjoy all
the pleasures of life.

Escape from this box --
is the happy ending to my dream

Joyce Joseph
Source: The Women of the Regent Hotel

III. THE EFFECTS OF HOMELESSNESS ON CHILDREN

Research on the effects of homelessness on children falls into five major categories -- hunger and/or poor nutrition; poor health and/or inadequate health care; developmental delays; psychological stress; and barriers to educational services. Since each of these factors is an important determinant of the ability to learn, we will discuss major findings from the research before turning our attention to the current educational consequences of the housing crisis.

HUNGER AND POOR NUTRITION

In January, 1989, the majority of homeless families were struggling to survive on continually eroding levels of public assistance benefits. Living on incomes generally below 70% of the federal poverty line, families frequently have great difficulties making ends meet.[30]

Unfortunately, their struggle to survive is frequently compounded by unfair and erroneous case closing and benefit reductions. For example, the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Hunger surveyed 2,112 individuals in family shelters in New York City in 1987 and found that 49% of those who were eligible for food stamps were not receiving them. In addition, while the specific figures for homeless families have not been collected, over 50% of all New York City residents who were eligible for the federally funded Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in 1988 did not receive it.[31]

The effort to provide nourishing meals while living in a "welfare" hotel is described in a 1984 Community Services Society report.[32] On average, respondents ate 13 of 21 weekly meals in their hotel room; six meals were purchased from either a delicatessen or restaurant; and two meals were skipped. Further:

* 95% found it more difficult to prepare meals since becoming homeless.
* 92% had no refrigerator in the hotel room.
* No family had a stove; 72% illegally used a hot plate.
* 80% reported eating less food and food of lesser quality than they had previously; 67% said they "felt hungrier" since moving to the hotel.
* 97% reported that the food was more expensive than where they had previously lived.

The long term effects of an inadequate diet on children are well documented -- growth is affected;[33] physical health deteriorates;[34] mental health is adversely affected;[35] and they are unable to concentrate on learning.[36]

The impact of undernutrition on academic performance and physical ability has also been documented. In one such longitudinal study, the academic performance and physical development of 129 school-age children who suffered from severe undernutrition in the first year of life was compared with 129 classmates of similar social background with no history of undernutrition.[37] No differences were found in physical growth between the two groups. However, the group who experienced undernutrition showed deficits in cognitive and behavioral functions when compared with children who did not; they showed impaired academic performance; were more distractible; less likely to pay attention in class; received lower scores on their high school admissions test; and were more likely to drop out of school.

After a careful review of research documenting the existence of a link between nutrition and behavior, another researcher concludes that prevention rather than treatment is more effective in dealing with nutritional problems:[38]

"These observations suggest that prevention of nutritional problems deserves the highest priority in terms of public health policies.... Prevention rather than treatment of nutritional deficiencies holds greater promise for eliminating behavioral and developmental ill effects."

INCREASED HEALTH PROBLEMS AND INADEQUATE HEALTH CARE

The scarcity of adequate health care for homeless children begins with the paucity of prenatal care available to their mothers. The reproductive experiences of homeless women was examined in a 1987 study which compared the experiences of 401 homeless women who delivered children in New York City between 1982 and 1984 to two other groups.[39] The first comparison group represented 13,249 women who lived in low-income housing projects. The second comparison group consisted of all 241,558 live births by residents of New York City during the two-year time period. Data from birth and death certificates revealed that the homeless women:

* Reported significantly less prenatal care; 40% had no care compared to 14.5% of public housing residents, and 9% of all women in the city.
* Delivered a greater proportion of low birth weight babies; 16.3% of the babies born to homeless women were under 5.5 pounds compared to 11.4% of women who lived in public housing, and 7.4% of all women in the city.
* The rate of infant mortality was highest for children born to homeless women; 24.9 per 1,000 live births for homeless women, compared to 16.6 for women who lived in public housing, and 12.0 for all New York City women.

Among several recent studies documenting the health problems associated with homelessness are two conducted at medical centers in New York City. One used a retrospective review of the charts of 265 homeless children under age 5, who were treated at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Pediatric Clinic between January 1982 and May 1985. Their health status was compared with that of low-income housed children attending the same outpatient clinic.[40] Their major findings include:

* More homeless children were late in getting necessary immunizations; 27% of the homeless children were delayed in their immunization schedule compared to 8% of the housed comparison group.

* There was a greater prevalence of elevated lead levels in the blood of homeless children; 4% of the homeless children had elevated lead levels compared to 1.7% of the housed comparison group.

* The rate of admission to hospital for homeless children was almost twice that of the housed comparison group (11.6/1000 compared to 7.5/1000).

The other study, conducted at Bellevue Hospital in 1988, compared the charts of 90 homeless children who had visited the clinic (age 6 months to 12 years), with a matched cohort of housed children from families with annual incomes below the federal poverty level.[41] Their major findings include:

* 48% of the homeless children under age 2 were delayed in their immunization schedule compared to 16% of the comparison group.

* 50% of the homeless children had iron deficiencies, compared to 25% of the comparison group.

Similar findings have been obtained in studies conducted across the country. One major study examined the medical records of 1,028 homeless children under 15 years who were treated at Robert Wood Johnson health centers in 16 cities (including New York) in 1985 and 1986.[42] Using information from the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, the occurrence of various diseases and disorders among homeless children were compared with the rates observed among U.S. ambulatory patients in general.

As shown in Table 2, all of the disorders were more common among homeless children. In fact, most occurred at more than double the rate among homeless children. The most common disorders among homeless children were upper respiratory infections (42%);

TABLE 2

Occurrence of Select Physical Disorders among Homeless and National Ambulatory Care Survey Children[1]

PHYSICAL DISORDER:	Percent Diagnosed HOMELESS (1,028)	CONTROL (6,055)
Infectious & parasitic diseases	3.7	2.2
Infestational ailments	7.3	.2
Nutritional deficiencies	1.6	N/A
Anemia	2.2	1.1
Neurological disorders	1.9	.6
Seizure disorders	1.0	.1
Eye disorders	8.3	4.0
Ear disorders	18.0	11.9
Cardiac disorders	2.8	0.5
Minor upper respiratory infections	41.9	22.4
Major upper respiratory infections	2.8	2.2
Gastrointestinal disorders	15.0	3.5
Teeth problems	4.5	.4
Pregnancy[2]	3.6	N/A
Major skin disorders	3.6	1.5
Minor skin disorders	19.8	5.4
Peripheral vascular disorders	1.9	.6
Any trauma	10.2	7.0
Chronic physical disorders	15.4	8.8
Sexually transmitted diseases	1.4	1.0

Source: Wright, J. D. 1987a, p. 85.
[1]Age 15 years or less
[2]Females only (N=496)
N/A = Not Available

minor skin ailments (20%); ear disorders (18%); chronic physical disorders (15%); and gastrointestinal disorders (15%). Based on these findings, the author concluded:[43]

> "There is scarcely any aspect of a homeless existence that does not in some way imperil a person's physical health or at least complicate the delivery of adequate health care. Among the many good reasons to do something about homelessness is thus that homelessness makes people ill; in the extreme case, it is a fatal condition."

The lack of primary and preventive health care available to homeless families compounds their health problems. While research has demonstrated that poor children have less access to quality health care than middle-class children,[44] children who are both poor and homeless are at an even greater disadvantage. Access to timely and consistent health care is compromised by extreme poverty, being bounced between facilities, frequent disruptions in family life, and inadequate shelter conditions.[45] Access to care for homeless families has also been linked with insurance status in a recent study conducted in Philadelphia.[46] Overall, 31% (22) of the 70 families interviewed had no health insurance, compared to 16% of low income families in the general population.

DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS AMONG PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

Little research has been conducted on the developmental abilities of homeless children. What has been undertaken, however, suggests that if homeless pre-schoolers are to succeed later in life, preventive intervention programs must be implemented very early in their lives.

According to a 1988 Child Care, Inc. report[47] concerning the 6,000 children under the age of six years living in temporary facilities in New York City:

> "The infants and toddlers spend most of their time in cribs, strollers, or the arms of their parents. Pre-school age children spend their time in small airless rooms and dangerous hallways. There is little opportunity for the kind of exploration and interactive play that we know lay the foundation for healthy physical, emotional, and cognitive growth."

The impact of homelessness on children's developmental abilities was recently examined among 81 children (age 5 or younger) living in family shelters in Massachusetts.[48] The Denver Developmental Screening Test[49] was used to evaluate gross and fine motor skills, language, and personal and social development.

Overall, 47% (38 children) manifested at least one developmental lag*, 33% (27) had two or more, and 14% (11) failed in all four areas. The percentage of children with a developmental lag in each major area are as follows:

* 36% (33 children) demonstrated language delays.
* 34% (32 children) could not complete the personal and social developmental tasks.
* 18% (16 children) lacked gross motor skills.
* 15% (14 children) lacked fine motor coordination.

In a follow-up to this study, a subgroup of the sample (those sheltered in the Boston area only) was compared with housed children.[50] Mothers of both the housed and the homeless children were public assistance recipients, currently single, and had a similar number of children. Of the 48 homeless pre-schoolers tested, 54% (26 children) manifested at least one developmental lag compared to 16% (12 children) of the 75 permanently housed pre-schoolers.

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* A "developmental lag" is defined here as the inability to complete a task that 90% of one's peers can complete

The impact of homelessness on the development of language skills and cognitive ability has also been studied among 88 children under the age of 5 years who lived in a dormitory style shelter for homeless families in St. Louis, Missouri.[51] Preliminary findings indicate that these children demonstrated severe language disability as well as impaired cognitive ability:*

* 42% scored at or below "borderline" on cognitive ability.

* 67% were delayed in their capacity to produce and use language.

A recent report, "Home is Where the Heart Is," documents observational and teachers' anecdotal accounts of the impact of homelessness on New York City's homeless pre-schoolers (2-1/2 to 5 years).[52] A total of 14 early childhood programs for homeless children (6 on-site at shelters/hotels) were visited. Based on their prior experiences working with permanently housed poor children, the following behaviors were most frequently mentioned by teachers and observed by the project staff as particularly distressing:

(a) Short attention span (difficulty sitting still and focusing attention on an activity that others were engaged in);

(b) Withdrawal (tendency to isolate self from others and, instead, engaging in self-stimulating activities such as thumb sucking);

(c) Aggression (quick to overreact; intrusive behavior);

(d) Speech delays (child is difficult to understand and refrains from the use of language to express needs);

(e) Sleep disorders (afraid to fall asleep, difficulty staying asleep);

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* Language ability was assessed by the Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT-R), and cognitive ability was assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-R).

(f) "Regressive"/toddler-like behaviors (thumb sucking, putting toys in mouth);

(g) Inappropriate social interaction with adults (unusually friendly with strangers e.g. hugging, craves attention);

(h) Immature peer interaction (does not like to share);

(i) Strong sibling relationships (overly protective);

(j) Immature gross motor behavior (clumsy stride); and

(k) Food issues (hungry, hoarding at meals).

While these generalizations are not true for all homeless pre-schoolers, their existence indicates that the experiences to which homeless children are being exposed are not conducive to their timely development.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Over the last few years, Ellen Bassuk and her colleagues have examined the psychological impact of homelessness on 82 families with 156 children (under 18 years) living in family shelters in Massachusetts.[53] Of the children interviewed, approximately 65% (101) were 5 years or younger, and the number of boys (73) and girls (83) was approximately equal. Their psychological status was assessed using measures of depression, anxiety, and behavioral disturbances.

Depression

Depression among children older than 5 (44) was evaluated using the Children's Depression Inventory, a paper and pencil task which assesses the frequency of personal feelings such as sadness during the previous two week period.[54] The results indicate that:[55]

* 54% (24) scored higher than 9 (the cutoff point indicating a need for psychiatric evaluation).

* 31% (13) were clinically depressed.

* Their average score of 10.4 is significantly higher than a score of 8.3 from a comparison group of 33 permanently housed poor children.

As shown in Table 3, this sample of homeless children was more depressed than six of eight comparison groups to whom this inventory was administered during the development of the test.

Anxiety

Anxiety was assessed using the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, a checklist on which children over the age of 5 complete statements that seem true about themselves (e.g. I worry a lot of the time, I am afraid of a lot of things).[56] Of the 29 children who completed the scale, 31% (9) had an anxiety level which indicated a need for psychiatric evaluation compared to 9% (3) of 34 permanently housed children.[57]

Behavior Problems

Behavioral disturbances were assessed using the Achenbach Behavior Problem Checklist, which parents fill out concerning their children's behavior.[58]

* Among the 29 children between 6 and 11 years, 66% of boys and almost 50% of girls scored over the 90th percentile, indicating a need for psychiatric evaluation.

* Among the 13 children between 12 and 16 years, 38% scored higher than the 90th percentile, indicating a need for psychiatric evaluation.

Behavioral disturbances have also been reported among homeless children in New York City hotels and shelters. On-site interviews with 83 families by Citizens Committee for Children revealed that 66% of the parents had observed behavior changes in their children since they became homeless.[59] As expected, the most frequently reported behavioral changes were increases in acting-out, fighting, restlessness, depression, and moodiness.

Pre-school age homeless children have also been found to manifest behavioral disturbances.[60] In this study, the Simmons Behavior checklist[61] was used to ascertain the extent of behavior disturbances in 55 children between the ages of 3 and 5 years.

TABLE 3

Comparison of Massachusetts Sheltered Children and Various Other Samples on the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI)

FACTOR	CDI SCORE CHARACTERISTICS		
	N	Mean	S.D.
Major Depressive Disorder	27	13.6	6.7
Dysthymic Disorder	12	12.2	7.9
Homeless Children (Bassuk's et al. sample)	42	10.4	6.4
Child Psychiatric Outpatient Referrals	75	9.7	7.3
Comparison Group with Various DSM-III Diagnoses	40	9.1	6.3
Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood	10	8.9	6.4
Conduct/Oppositional Disorder	22	7.4	5.1
Partially Remitted Major Depressive Disorder	12	6.3	5.0
Recently Diagnosed Juvenile Diabetes	61	5.9	4.3

Source: Bassuk, E. & Rubin, L. 1987, p. 283.

This 28-item checklist yields a total score in addition to 11 subscales. As shown in Table 4, the homeless children's overall mean score was significantly higher than the means for comparison groups of "normal" and "disturbed" children. The homeless children scored significantly higher than housed "normal" children on the following problems: attention, sleep, shyness, speech, withdrawal, and aggression. It is interesting to observe that the only area in which homeless children scored better than both comparison groups was their being significantly less afraid of new things.

SUMMARY

The majority of research on the impact of homelessness on children has focused on health problems and access to primary and preventive health care services. These studies have consistently found that, while homeless children are subject to the same illnesses as housed children, they are sick more frequently than their permanently housed peers. Health problems and inadequate health care diminish their opportunity and ability to be educated. A sick child cannot study, do homework, or attend school. These, in turn, result in poorer academic performance.

In addition, the higher rate of untreated ear infections among homeless children elevates their risk for hearing loss, as well as having a detrimental impact on language and other developmental delays.[62]

Hunger and poor nutrition also have a deleterious impact on the ability to be educated. Proper nutrition is essential for adequate brain development; hungry children have a hard time paying attention and concentrating. Undernutrition has also been linked with deficits in cognitive and behavioral functions.

Despite the limited amount of research available on the developmental levels of homeless pre-schoolers, the findings that do exist suggest that important predictors of school

TABLE 4

Comparison of Normal, Emotionally Disturbed, and Massachusetts Sheltered Children on the Simmons Behavior Checklist

	Group Means		
FACTOR SCALES	NORMAL (N=17)	DISTURBED (N=17)	HOMELESS (N=55)
Mean Total Score	1.9	2.3	5.6
Attention	6.2	9.5	7.3
Sleep Problems	3.7	3.7	4.5
Shyness	8.4	7.9	9.6
Speech	2.8	5.7	3.5
Dependency	7.1	8.9	7.4
Toilet Training	2.7	2.9	2.8
Withdrawal	4.9	6.0	6.1
Demanding Behavior	5.5	5.8	5.7
Fear of New Things	4.7	4.3	3.8
Aggression	6.2	6.7	7.4
Coordination	3.6	4.6	4.1

Source: Bassuk, E. & Rubin, L. 1987, p. 282.

success such as the development of language, motor skills, cognitive ability, and social development are compromised by homelessness. The existence of delays in motor and/or personal and social development, as well as language skills, pinpoints the urgent need for early intervention programs for these children.

Given the destructive physical and psychological environmental conditions under which homeless children live, it is not surprising that they appear be at increased risk for anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. These psychological factors are well known to interfere with one's capacity to learn.[63] However, since only one study has evaluated the psychological impact of homelessness on children, additional research in this area is needed.

St. REGENT HOTEL

Children running and screaming
in the halls
graffiti and filth
all over the walls
there's never a dull
or quiet moment
in here
Mice on the run everywhere
Musty odors in the air
Sharing beds, sharing rooms
the kids are frustrated from
the sight of gloom

One more night of anxiety here
and we'll be home.

Evelyn
Source: The Women of the Regent Hotel

IV. EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HOMELESS CHILDREN

According to a 1989 U.S. Department of Education report based on December, 1988 interim reports from 50 states, there are 220,000 school-age homeless children in the United States, 67,000 (30%) of whom do not attend school regularly.[64] The state counts were required under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987.

Advocates for the homeless believe the government's figures trivialize the problem and understate the facts. The National Coalition for the Homeless, for example, estimates that there are between 500,000 and 750,000 school-age homeless children nationwide, 57% of whom do not attend school regularly.[65] Despite the disagreement on statistics, all parties agree that the number of homeless children nationwide has reached alarming proportions and that something must be done about it.

In July, 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (Public Law 100-77) was enacted, providing the nation's first legislative response to the needs of the homeless population. The Act authorizes funds for a comprehensive range of emergency food and shelter, housing, health and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, education, job training, and veterans assistance services for the homeless.

The education provisions of the Act[66] specifically address the five barriers which have confronted homeless children in obtaining and maintaining access to a free public education: (1) residency requirements; (2) guardianship requirements; (3) special education requirements; (4) inability to obtain school records; and (5) lack of transportation:

* Residency Requirements: Section 722(3) prohibits the use of residency laws to deny homeless children their right to an education:

"The local educational agency of each homeless child or youth shall either (a) continue the child's or youth's education in the school district of origin for the remainder of the school year; or (b) enroll the child or youth in the school district where the child or youth is actually living - whichever is in the child's best interest or the youth's best interest."

* Guardianship Requirements: Section 722(4) addresses the education of children who do not reside with their parents:

"The choice regarding (educational) placement shall be made regardless of whether the child or youth is living with the homeless parents or has been temporarily placed elsewhere by the parents."

* Special Education Requirements: Section 722(5) requires that educational services to homeless children with special needs be provided on the same basis as those provided to their permanently housed peers:

"Each homeless child shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school . . . including educational services for which the child meets the eligibility criteria, such as compensatory educational programs for the disadvantaged and educational programs for the handicapped and for students with limited English proficiency; programs in vocational education; programs for the gifted and talented; and school meals programs."

* Inability to Obtain School Records: Section 722(6) requires the timely transfer of school records when homeless children move from one district to another:

"The school records of each homeless child . . . shall be maintained . . . so that the records are available, in a timely manner, when a child . . . enters a new school district...."

* Lack of Transportation: While transportation provisions are not included in the Act itself, the joint statement of conferees accompanying it states that transportation to and from school be provided to homeless students in a non-discriminatory manner.

The recently issued 1989 U.S. Department of Education report indicated that, in many states, barriers to education continue to interfere with homeless children's access to educational services. In addition, other major problems not previously identified were noted:

* Youths become discouraged as a result of frequent school changes and absences, and are at a higher risk of dropping out of school.

* A lack of financial resources for clothes and supplies interferes with regular school attendance.

* Shelter stays are often too short to make enrollment in a nearby school worthwhile.

* School-age parents frequently do not have access to day care services for their children, and are therefore unable to attend school.

* A lack of primary health care and mental health care services interferes with regular school attendance.

NEW YORK CITY'S RESPONSE

New York City was the first major school system in the nation to enact regulations to remove the barriers to education that confront homeless children. In March, 1987, at the urging of educational and homeless advocates, then Chancellor Nathan Quinones proposed, and the New York City Board of Education adopted, Chancellor's Regulation A-780. Thus, a plan to ensure homeless children equal access to education was instituted. The regulation's provisions, many of which were subsequently adopted statewide and nationally in the McKinney Act, include the following protections:

* A student relocated to temporary housing shall be given the option of remaining in his/her previous school or attending the local school to which the temporary residence is zoned, at the parent's choice.

* Notwithstanding the above, students who require placement in a special program (i.e. gifted or bilingual) shall be placed in such a program.

* Students are to be integrated in classes and school programs with permanently housed children.

With these regulations, New York City established the framework for delivery of services for its homeless school-age children. The implementation of the specifics of that service delivery plan has gone through several changes over the last two years, with various degrees of successes and disappointments - largely focused on attendance issues.

In the spring of 1987, the Office of Student Progress had 3 community coordinators, 11 attendance teachers, and 13 family assistants in the Hotel Unit to oversee the education of 6,000 school-age homeless children. This translated into a caseload of 350 children for each family assistant. Given these excessive workload demands, as well as other problems, it is not surprising that New York City Board of Education initiatives were not very successful. The flaws in the system during that period are addressed in a 1988 report on the homeless, issued by the New York State Department of Education.[67]

> "By late fall, serious flaws in the system became apparent, resulting in a great deal of negative publicity directed at the Board for its apparent inability to register and track homeless children in a timely manner. Key identified problems included a lack of clarity regarding administrative roles, poor coordination with school districts and technical difficulties in matching two different data collection systems (Board of Education and Human Resources Administration)."

In response to some of these problems, in September, 1988, then Chancellor Richard Green shifted the operation of the program for students residing in temporary housing from the Central Board of Education to the local school districts. By January, 1989, each district assumed full responsibility for coordinating educational services for <u>all</u> homeless students living in its area, whether or not they attend school locally. The specific responsibilities of the Central Board of Education and the Community School Districts are described in the State Plan.[68]

THE IMPACT OF THE McKINNEY ACT ON THE NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION

The New York State Education Department applied for federal funds under the McKinney Act in April, 1988. It received $406,371 to gather information on the provision of education to homeless children and youth and to establish a plan to ensure that these youngsters are educated. In accordance with the Act, New York State established an office of Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth which reports to the State Commissioner of Education.

The coordinator's responsibilities include (1) gathering data on the number and location of school-age homeless children; (2) determining the nature and extent of problems concerning access to and placement in public schools of homeless children; (3) identifying the special educational needs of homeless children; and (4) developing a State Plan to provide for the education of each homeless child.

The State Plan must provide for continuation of the child's education in the school district of origin or the school district in which the child or youth is living, whichever is in the "best interest" of the child or youth, and assure that homeless children have access to educational services comparable to those offered to other students for which they are otherwise eligible. New York's 1989-1991 State Plan was approved by the Regents shortly before the U.S. Department of Education's submission deadline of April 30, 1989.[69]

New York State has identified four major goals to be accomplished during the 1989-1991 school years pertaining to the education of homeless children. As outlined in the State Plan, these goals are as follows:

* Locate, register and ensure regular attendance;
* Promptly identify the educational needs of homeless children and provide necessary services;

* Identify and provide for necessary related support services, in cooperation with appropriate agencies; and

* Develop comprehensive information regarding homeless children.

One major limitation of the State Plan is that it only addresses the problems of those children already "in the system." It offers nothing for children living in doubled up situations, in runaway shelters, or in the streets. It completely ignores the thousands of runaways and other adolescents on their own in New York City. Further, the plan fails to make any provision for follow-up services after the family's relocation to permanent housing. This omission is critical because the impact of homelessness on the ability to be educated does not cease immediately upon return to permanent housing.

RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

> "Everyday, in every hotel we find school-age children who are not attending school. Extraordinary rates of absenteeism and, as many expect, very high rates of school failure to one degree or another are clearly problems for these children. I am deeply concerned by this "educational starvation." Potentially irrecoverable losses of human potential are the price these children will pay for these deprivations of schooling and cognitive stimulation."[70]
>
> Dr. Irwin Redlener
> Cornell University Medical School

While little research has been conducted on the education of homeless children, the extent to which attendance is a problem is addressed in two studies conducted by Citizens Committee for Children. The first, conducted during the Spring of 1984, was based on interviews with 83 families from eight hotels and two Tier I shelters.[71] The second, conducted in 1988, involved interviews with 43 parents in Tier I shelters.[72] The attendance problems most frequently mentioned included:

* Delays when transferring children to local schools. Of 61 families sheltered in hotels, 50% indicated that they had been in the hotel for one month or longer before their children started to attend school again.

* Lack of transportation money for students who were attending their former school, and for their parents to escort them.

Erratic school attendance is also mentioned in a 1988 New York State Department of Education report on the state's homeless population.[73] Citing data from the Chancellor's office on the attendance of the 6,400 homeless school-age children in New York City schools as of November, 1987, erratic attendance (4 or more days absent per week) was reported to be a problem for:

* 28% of New York City's homeless elementary school children - a sharp improvement compared to 50-55% in 1986, and

* 55% of New York City's homeless secondary school students - no different from the 1986 figures.

In 1988, the Child Welfare League of America and the Travelers Aid Society conducted a study of 163 families, including 340 children, from 33 different states who sought assistance from Travelers Aid agencies.[74] They report that:

* 43% of the school-age children were not attending school.

* 30% of the children who were attending school were behind at least one grade.

Finally, in the Massachusetts study by Ellen Bassuk described previously,[75] the parents of 50 school-age children reported that:

* All 50 children were enrolled in school.

* 43% (21) of the 50 children were failing or performing below-average work compared to 23% (8) of a comparison group of 34 housed peers.[76]

* 25% (13) were in special classes.

* 43% (22) had repeated a grade.

Unfortunately, there is no comparison data on the number of housed peers in special classes or who had repeated a grade.

From the limited amount of research in this area, it appears that school attendance and academic performance pose serious problems for homeless children, and that these factors are adversely affected by living in temporary facilities. Our own research set out to explore these issues further.

HOMELESS SARATOGA

Living in here is really hard
There's gates all around
and the windows got bars.

The food is good
but mostly bad.
Living in here is really sad.

Walking to the store
is like a game of death.
You can't even stop
to take a breath.

To leave the building
you have to sign
and you got to come in
at a certain time.

If you do something wrong
you will get kicked out.
That's what this place
is all about.

Mike Tarantola
Source: The Waterways Project

V. RESEARCH COMPONENT: IMPACT ON EDUCATION

In order to investigate whether or not the ability to be educated is affected by homelessness, we designed a research study with two major components.

One component involved the compilation and analysis of statistical data by the New York City Board of Education on school attendance, academic performance, and other indices of school success of children in temporary housing. All children in the Board of Education's students in temporary housing database between September, 1987 and May, 1988 were included in these analysis (N=9,659). Findings for homeless children were then compared with available overall data on all New York City students.

The other component of our study was comprised of field-based interviews with 277 families residing in temporary facilities in New York City between November, 1988 and February, 1989. We developed a detailed survey instrument, including focused and closed-ended questions about family demographics, prior living arrangements, events leading to the request for emergency shelter, experiences with the shelter system, physical health, and the educational experiences of children who were between the age of 6 and 19 years, if they were currently living with the family. Ideally, we would have liked to interview all of New York City's homeless families in temporary shelters, or at least a random sample from each of the 82 different facilities. This was not possible for several reasons. First, a total of approximately 12,000 homeless families sought emergency shelter in 1988.[77] Second, homelessness is a transient situation, often compared to a revolving door with families moving in and out of the system and, at the same time, back and forth from shelter to shelter. Third, we were unable to obtain the necessary cooperation from the Human Resources Administration to gain access to the Tier I shelters which they operate, and

from the managers of the hotels where the majority of families are temporarily sheltered. Finally, we were limited by time and financial constraints.

Instead, we interviewed families who were on the premises of hotels and shelters when we arrived there, as well as those who were told by staff or other families at the facility that we were interested in interviewing them. The selection of shelters and hotels was based on two criteria: the presence of school-age children at the facility and our ability to gain entry.

Interviews were conducted by five staff members from Advocates for Children, each of whom was trained to administer the survey in role playing sessions and pilot testing. Interviews were conducted in several types of locations including (1) the family's room; (2) an on-site office; or (3) a facility nearby (e.g. church, boys' club). Each interview took from 30 - 60 minutes, depending primarily on the number of school-age children living with the family. All respondents were assured that their individual responses would be confidential. No family refused to be interviewed, and many welcomed the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

VI. RESULTS

A. THE FAMILIES

We interviewed 277 parents, each from different families, who were living in one of 10 New York City shelters and hotels for homeless families between November, 1988 and February, 1989. Table 5 contains a list of the facilities, as well as the number of families interviewed at each site, in each borough, and at each type of facility.

The parents interviewed are predominantly female (87%). Half are single (49%). Their ages range from 20 to 63 years, with a median age of 32 years. Almost half (47%) have at least a high school diploma or an equivalency diploma. The majority are either African-American (74%) or Latino/Hispanic (22%). Homelessness was not a recent occurrence for most (Mean=16 months): 70% (194) had lost their permanent home more than 6 months ago; 47% (129) had been homeless for more than one year, and 18% (50) for more than 2 years. Demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 6.

The majority are currently receiving public assistance (86%) and food stamps (84%). Several families had no income at all because their case was closed, or they were waiting for a new one to be opened. While all families living in hotels are entitled to a restaurant allowance, only 62% of our 125 survey respondents living in commercial hotels were receiving one. In fact, respondents frequently mentioned that their public assistance delivery was often interrupted, inefficient, and unresponsive to their needs.

The 277 parents who participated in our study had a total of 790 children (an average of 2.85 children per family). However, not all of these 790 children were currently living with their family in the shelter or hotel. Overall, 148 children (116 of whom were under the age of 21), from 78 different families were living elsewhere - usually with former spouses, other relatives, or in foster care.

TABLE 5

Shelter/Hotel Information of Survey Respondents

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Name of Temporary[1] Facility	277	East Third Street (TI)	48	17.3
		Prince George Hotel	46	16.6
		Catherine Street (TI)	35	12.6
		Saratoga (TII)	26	9.4
		Prospect (TII)	22	7.9
		Regent Hotel	23	8.3
		Allerton Hotel	20	7.2
		Hamilton Hotel	19	6.9
		Harriet Tubman (TII)	19	6.9
		Colonial Hotel	14	5.1
Location of Facility	277	Manhattan	212	76.5
		Queens	40	14.4
		Bronx	22	7.9
		Brooklyn	2	.7
		Staten Island	1	.4
Type of Facility	277	Hotel	125	45.1
		Tier I	84	30.3
		Tier II	68	24.5

[1]We also interviewed five families from five shelters not listed here. These families were present at other facilities where we interviewed.

Note: TI = Tier I Shelter
TI = Tier II Shelter

TABLE 6

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Gender	277	Female	241	87.0
		Male	36	13.0
Marital Status	277	Single/Never Married	136	49.1
		Currently Married	54	19.5
		Living As Married	33	11.9
		Other[1]	54	19.5
Age in years	273	20 - 29	103	37.7
		30 - 39	138	50.5
		40 +	32	11.7
Education (Last Grade Completed)	277	Grades 3 - 9	40	14.4
		Grades 10 - 11	107	38.6
		High School Graduate	72	26.0
		GED	18	6.5
		Some College	40	14.4
Race/Ethnicity	277	African-American	204	73.6
		Latino/Hispanic	60	21.7
		Other	13	4.7
Time Elapsed Since Loss of Permanent Home	277	0 - 6 months	83	30.0
		7 - 12 months	65	23.4
		13 - 24 months	79	28.5
		> 2 years	50	18.1
Number of Children Currently Living With Parent	277	1	83	30.0
		2	83	30.0
		3	73	26.4
		4	22	7.9
		5 - 8	16	5.8

Note: N varies due to missing data.

[1]Separated/Divorced/Widowed

As shown in Table 6, 30% of the parents interviewed had one child currently living with them, while 40% had three or more.

Overall, there were 427 children between the ages of 6 and 19 years living with their family in temporary housing. Each parent was asked about the educational experiences of these children. These findings will be discussed in the following section.

Prior Living Arrangements

The prior living arrangements of the families we interviewed are summarized in Table 7. The vast majority (88%) lived in New York City prior to losing their permanent residence -- Brooklyn was cited most frequently as the location of prior home (29%), followed by the Bronx (24%), and then Manhattan (21%).

About half, 49% (136), had rented a privately owned apartment; 28% (77) had lived in public housing; and 18% (49) had been living in shared housing. The length of time the families had lived in their last permanent home ranged from 1 month to 30 years. Less than 10% (27) had lived in their last permanent home for less than one year, while 23% (64) had lived there for more than five years.

Eviction was cited most frequently as the principal reason for loss of permanent housing -- by 38% (105) of the families interviewed. In fact, many who had been evicted for their inability to pay the rent (51 families) complained that the city's interruption of their public assistance had resulted in their homelessness. The second most common reason was fire -- by 20% (55 of the families interviewed). Other reasons included having to leave due to unfit living conditions of the apartment, building, or neighborhood - often drug related (10%) or abusive spouse or relationship difficulties (10%).

TABLE 7

Prior Living Arrangements of Survey Respondents

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Location of Prior Permanent Home	277	Brooklyn	81	29.2
		Bronx	67	24.2
		Manhattan	57	20.6
		Queens	33	11.9
		Staten Island	6	2.2
		Outside NYC	33	11.9
Type of Prior Housing	276	Own Apartment	136	49.1
		Public Housing	77	27.8
		Shared Housing	49	17.7
		Other	14	5.1
Time Lived in Prior Permanent Home	276	1 - 12 months	55	19.9
		13 - 24 months	52	18.8
		25 - 36 months	40	14.5
		37 - 48 months	37	13.4
		49 - 60 months	28	10.1
		> 5 years	64	23.2
Reason for Leaving Prior Permanent Home	277	Eviction	105	37.9
		Fire	55	19.9
		Unfit Conditions	29	10.5
		Abusive Spouse	27	9.7
		Left by Choice	26	9.3
		Other[1]	35	12.7

Note: N varies due to missing data.
[1]Crowded, shared housing, condemned building, conversion, etc.

Emergency Housing Experiences

On average, families had been in the emergency shelter system for 12 months. The majority did not seek assistance from the Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU) immediately after losing their permanent homes. Instead, 154 families (56%) made other arrangements: 112 "doubled up" with family or friends, and 42 stayed elsewhere (in a regular hotel, a battered womens' shelter, a car, or an abandoned building). The shelter experiences of survey respondents are summarized in Table 8.

Overall, 71% (174) of the 244 families interviewed who lived in New York before becoming homeless are in facilities in a different borough from their prior permanent home. Only 5 (15%) of the 33 families who formerly lived in Queens are currently sheltered in Queens; 12 (18%) of the 67 families from the Bronx are currently living in the Bronx. Ironically, 8 (12%) of the 67 families from the Bronx are currently living in Queens, while 79% of the 33 families from Queens (26) are currently living in Manhattan.

The average length of time families had lived in their current facility was 7.3 months. Almost half (136) had been there for four months or less, while 52 families (19%) had been there for more than one year. In addition, 66% (182 families) had been in at least one other shelter or hotel before their current placement; 29% (80) had been in at least four facilities; and 10% (27) had been in at least seven facilities.

There was a significant correlation between the length of time a family had been in the emergency shelter system and the number of facilities in which they had been sheltered.* Furthermore, the proportion of families who had been in at least four facilities rises steadily with the length of time in the system:

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* (r (277) = .28,$p<.001$).

TABLE 8

Emergency Housing Experiences of Survey Respondents

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Where Stayed After Loss of Home	277	Went to EAU	123	44.4
		Doubled up	112	40.4
		Other	42	15.2
Location of Shelter/Hotel vs. Permanent Home	244[1]	Same Borough	70	28.7
		Different Borough	174	71.3
Months in Current Facility	277	0 - 4	136	49.1
		5 - 8	56	20.2
		9 - 12	33	11.9
		> 12	52	18.7
Total number of Temporary Facilities Where Sheltered	277	One	95	34.3
		Two	71	25.6
		Three	31	10.9
		Four	27	9.7
		Five	16	5.8
		Six	10	3.6
		Seven-Eleven	17	6.0
		>11 facilities	10	3.7

[1]This question did not apply to the 33 families from outside of New York City.

* 26% (28) of the 107 families in the system for 0-6 months had been in at least four facilities.

* 37% (24) of the 64 families in the system for 7-12 months had been in at least four facilities.

* 54% (38) of the 70 families in the system for 13-24 months had been in at least four facilities.

* 66% (21) of the 32 families in the system more than 2 years had been in at least four facilities.

While "bouncing" between facilities generally increases with time "in the system," it is also important to note that 28 families who had been in the system for only 6 months or less had already been bounced between three or more facilities. In fact, of these 28 families:

* 12 had been in 3 facilities.
* 6 had been in 4 facilities.
* 3 had been in 5 facilities.
* 2 had been in 6 facilities.
* 1 had been in 7 facilities.
* 4 had been in 8 - 11 facilities.

Sadly, in every one of these 28 families, there was at least one school-age child making these repeated and frequent moves.

Health Care

As shown in Table 9, thirty families (11%) lacked any form of health insurance, and 85% (236) had Medicaid. Approximately half, 52% (145), receive health care at a public or hospital-based clinic; 17% (48) could not identify one particular place; and 11% (31) relied on an emergency room as their primary source of health care.

Overall, 30% (84) of the parents indicated that their children's general health had gotten worse since they lost their permanent home. The most frequently mentioned child health problem was ear infections -- cited by 38% (105) of the parents as afflicting one or

TABLE 9

Physical Health of Survey Respondents

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Health Insurance	277	None	30	10.8
		Medicaid	236	85.2
		Private Policy	11	4.0
Receive Medical Care	277	Clinics	145	52.3
		No usual place	48	17.3
		Private office	35	12.6
		Emergency room	31	11.2
		On-site[1]	18	6.4
Health Status of Children Since Losing Home	277	Stayed the same	165	59.6
		Gotten worse	84	30.3
		Gotten better	28	10.1

[1]Includes medical van.

more of their children. This was followed by asthma -- cited by 26% (72) of the parents. Diarrhea was cited by 24% (66) and skin rashes by 23% (64).

B. THE CHILDREN OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

For each of the 427 children between the age of 6 and 19 years living with their parent(s), we asked their parents a series of questions pertaining to their educational experiences. Of the 427 children, 390 (91%) are currently enrolled in school. Of the remaining 37, 14 have dropped out, 3 have graduated, and 20 are not attending because they are awaiting placement and/or transfer. Among these 20 children is Darin K.

> Darin K. is a 7-year-old boy who last attended school in October, 1988 - four months prior to our interview with his mother. Ms. K, a 27-year-old single parent with two years of college, requested emergency housing in May, 1988. At that time Darin was attending school in the Bronx, where he was in second grade. During the family's subsequent 5-month stay at the 151st Street Tier I Shelter in the Bronx, Darin continued to attend his prior school.
>
> At the end of October, Darin and his mother were transferred out of the 151st Street shelter and, according to Ms. K., "The system started to bounce us around like you would a yo yo." During the following 11 weeks, the family spent 2 weeks at the Mets in Queens, 2 weeks at the Times Square Motel in Manhattan, 2 weeks back at the Mets in Queens, 2 weeks in Manhattan at the New Crown, 2 weeks back at the Mets, one week at the Bristol and, finally, landed in their current placement in Queens.
>
> When the family was first transferred to the Mets in Queens, Ms. K. did not transfer Darin to a local school since, "The Mets is where you only stay for a very short time, and we knew we'd be moving again in a few days. We were hoping to be moved back to where his school was in the Bronx." When she was approached by a Board of Education staff person at the Times Square Motel in Manhattan several weeks later, she explained her position. Here, she was informed that Darin could get a subway pass to go back and forth to his school in the Bronx and that it would be issued in a few more days. Unfortunately, by the time the pass was issued, the family had been bounced back across the East River to Queens.

We will now turn our discussion to the 390 children who are currently enrolled in school. Table 10 contains the frequency and percentage of the 390 children at each site, as

TABLE 10

Demographic Characteristics of the Children of Survey Respondents

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY		PERCENT
Name of Temporary Facility	390	Prince George Hotel	76	Man	19.5
		East Third (TI)	53	Man	13.6
		Catherine Street (TI)	46	Man	11.8
		Saratoga (TII)	36	Q	9.2
		Regent Hotel	34	Man	8.7
		Hamilton Hotel	32	Man	8.2
		Prospect (TII)	31	Bx	8.0
		Harriet Tubman (TII)	30	Man	7.7
		Colonial Hotel	23	Q	5.9
		Allerton Hotel	22	Man	5.6
		Forbell (TI)	3	Bkln	.8
		SI Respite Center (TII)	2	S.I	.5
		Bryant Hotel	1	Man	.3
		New Crown Hotel	1	Man	.3
Type of Facility	390	Hotel	189		48.5
		Tier I Shelter	102		26.2
		Tier II Shelter	99		25.4
Location of Facility	390	Manhattan	295		76.6
		Queens	59		15.1
		Bronx	31		8.0
		Brooklyn	3		.8
		Staten Island	2		.5
Gender	390	Male	200		51.3
		Female	190		48.7
Age in years	390	6 - 7	107		27.4
		8 - 9	88		22.6
		10 - 11	77		19.7
		12 - 13	70		17.9
		14 - 19	48		12.3
Grade Level	390	K - 2	125		32.0
		3 - 4	99		25.4
		5 - 6	74		19.0
		7 - 8	54		13.8
		9 - 12	38		9.7

Note: TI = Tier I Shelter
TII= Tier II Shelter

well as select demographic characteristics. There are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls (51% vs. 49%); their ages range from 6 to 19, with a median age of 9.5 years; and a majority of 352 students (90%) are in kindergarten through 8th grade.

The Schools

Parents in temporary housing facilities must be given the option of keeping their children in the same school they attended at their last address or transferring them to local schools. As shown in Table 11, 71% (276) of the 390 children in our sample are currently enrolled in local schools, and 29% (111) attend school in the area where they formerly resided or were previously sheltered.

Overall, 42% (164) walk to school; 29% (114) take a school bus; and 28% (109) take public transportation. While the vast majority, 84% (328), attend school in the same borough as their temporary housing facility, a significant number, 16% (62), attend school in a different borough. Of the 295 children in temporary shelters in Manhattan, 27 attend school in Brooklyn, 18 attend school in the Bronx, 10 in Queens, and 3 in Staten Island. These children often travel considerable distances to maintain the continuity of their education.

The School Selection Process

Parents frequently mentioned that keeping children in their former school was more desirable because it provides:

* stability in an otherwise unstable world;
* continuity of instruction;
* continuity of friendships; and
* continuity of education in a school with a teacher they like.

Despite these advantages, many of the same parents indicated that they had transferred their children to the local school for practical and economic reasons. The overall

TABLE 11

School Information

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
School Attended	387[1]	Former School	111	28.7
		Local School	276	71.3
Transportation to School	390	Walks	164	42.1
		School Bus	114	29.2
		Subway/Bus	109	27.9
		Other	3	.8
Location of School vs. Temporary Shelter	390	Same Borough	328	84.1
		Different Borough	62	15.9

[1]Note: N varies due to missing data.

rate of transferring children to the local school from their former school was influenced by six major factors: (1) type of facility where sheltered; (2) age/grade of the children; (3) distance; (4) parents' knowledge of their right to choose; (5) parents' knowledge of free transportation; and (6) lack of school bus transportation.

Type of facility: Children sheltered in Tier II facilities were more likely to transfer to local schools than either Tier I or hotel residents. The percentage of students attending local schools, from each type of temporary facility, is as follows:

* 83% (82) of the 99 Tier II residents;
* 68% (129) of the 189 hotel residents; and
* 66% (67) of the 102 Tier I residents.

Age/Grade of child: Older students were significantly less likely to attend their local school than were younger students. The percentage of students attending local schools, according to grade level, is as follows:

* 82% (103) of the 125 children in grades K - 2;
* 79% (78) of the 99 students in grades 3 and 4;
* 74% (55) of the 74 students in grades 5 and 6;
* 60% (33) of the 54 students in grades 7 or 8; and
* 24% (9) of the 38 students in grades 9 through 12.

Distance: Traveling long distances, sometimes from one end of the Bronx to the other end of Brooklyn, takes hours and can be dangerous. To ensure timely arrival in school, children who remain in their former schools must leave their temporary facility "at the crack of dawn," and, because of lengthy journeys back to their shelter or hotel, are frequently unable to participate in after-school programs.

Parent's knowledge of their right to choose: Contrary to the requirements of Chancellor's Regulation A-780, a significant number of children were transferred to local schools without their parent(s) being given the right to make this decision. Excluding the 27 children who had lived outside of New York City and had not been in a prior temporary facility, parents should have been involved in the decision concerning the remaining 363 children. However, the decision concerning 119 children (33%) was made without the parents being offered a choice.

Denial of the right to choose had a significant impact on which school children attend: 100% of the 119 children whose parents had not been given a choice were transferred to local schools. In contrast, 58% (142) of the 244 children whose parents had been given a choice were transferred to local schools.

Parents' knowledge of free transportation: Despite litigation on this issue, many parents did not know that their children are entitled to receive free transportation if they continue to attend their former schools. In other cases, parents did not know that they were entitled, through the Human Resources Administration, to receive carfare allowance for themselves to escort their children to and from school. In fact, 53% (75) of the 142 children who had been transferred to local schools, despite their parents being given a choice, were transferred because their parents could not afford the transportation costs and were not aware that the Board of Education and/or Human Resources Administration would pay for it. Indeed, of the 109 children who were taking public transportation back and forth to school, 18 had not been issued transportation passes.

Some parents, including some who knew their children would get free transportation, elected to transfer them because they could not afford the fare to escort them back and forth to school. Others questioned the policy of being reimbursed after they put out the money -

"Where is it supposed to come from?" they asked. Finally, several parents who specifically asked if carfare was available reported being told by their caseworker:

* "We don't give carfare."

* "Your case is closed; you're not eligible."

Surprisingly, in discussing this issue with on-site caseworkers, AFC interviewers often discovered workers who mentioned they were totally unaware of HRA's responsibility regarding transportation procedures.

Lack of school bus transportation: Even if transportation for both parent and child is paid for, keeping children in their former schools translates into an additional burden on the family and is often not a viable option. Since school bus transportation is not provided to those who choose to remain in their former school, younger students must be accompanied by their parent on subways and/or public buses to insure their safety. Choosing this option often results in poor attendance, especially on days when parent(s) must report to the Income Maintenance Center (usually twice a month), and interferes with time that could be spent looking for an apartment or job.

Ironically, for those 15 parents that we interviewed who are employed, "no school bus" translates into "no choice" because they cannot take the time from work that they would need to escort their children to and from school each day.

Number of Different Schools Attended

Homelessness had a dramatic impact on the number of schools attended by the children in our study. As shown in Table 12, 24% (94 children) of the 390 children had never transferred to a different school; 43% (168) had transferred once; 22% (86) had transferred twice; and 11% (42) had transferred 3 or more times. The number of schools attended was

TABLE 12

School Transfers Since Loss of Permanent Home

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
School Transfers Since Loss of Permanent Home (Overall)	390	None	94	24.1
		One	168	43.1
		Two	86	22.1
		3 - 6	42	10.7
School Transfers Since Loss of Permanent Home (Grades 9 - 12)	38	None	20	52.6
		One	9	23.7
		Two	4	10.6
		3 - 6	5	13.2
School Transfers Since Loss of Permanent Home (Grades K - 8)	352	None	74	21.0
		One	159	45.2
		Two	82	23.3
		3 - 6	37	10.5

significantly influenced by three major factors: (1) grade level; (2) length of time homeless; and (3) number of times bounced between facilities.

Grade Level: Students in grades 9 through 12 were less likely to transfer than those in grades K through 8. Of the 38 students in grades 9 through 12, 53% (20) had never transferred; 24% (9) had transferred once; 11% (4) had transferred twice; and 13% (5) had transferred three or more times. In contrast, of the 352 students in kindergarten through grade 8, 21% (74) had never transferred; 45% (159) had transferred once; 23% (82) had transferred twice; and 11% (37) had transferred three or more times.

Length of Time Homeless: The number of different schools attended was also influenced by the length of time elapsed since loss of permanent housing. The longer children had been homeless, the more likely they were to have had to transfer schools.* Similarly, the percentage of children who had transferred two to six times increased with length of time homeless:

* 18% (19) of the 105 children who had been homeless for 6 months or less had transferred two or more times.
* 34% (76) of the 226 children who had been homeless for 7-24 months had transferred two or more times.
* 56% (33) of the 59 children who had been homeless for more than two years had transferred two or more times.

Number of times bounced between facilities: The number of different schools attended was also significantly influenced by the number of shelters or hotels children had been in.** The greater the number of temporary facilities children had been in, the more

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* $r(390)=.21$, $p<.001$

** $r(390)=.32$, $p<.001$

likely they were to have transferred schools. Similarly, the percentage of children who had transferred two to six times increased with the number of temporary facilities they had been in:

* 13% (18) of the 142 children who had been in one facility had transferred 2 or more times.
* 35% (37) of the 106 children who had been in two facilities had transferred 2 or more times.
* 52% (74) of the 142 children who had been in three or more facilities had transferred 2 or more times.

Each school transfer represents time irrevocably lost. Many parents indicated that transferring their child to a different school every time they moved to a new shelter was having detrimental educational consequences. With each transfer, school records must be transferred and transportation issues, again, have to be resolved. Both processes frequently result in delays in attendance. Parents also noted that frequent transitions had a negative impact on their children's academic performance and attitude. The cumulative effect of these losses contributes to academic underachievement, high holdover rates, and a break in the continuity of learning.

The following example illustrates the impact of being bounced around the system on the education of homeless children.

> Pamela R. (age 8) and her family have been homeless for 10 months. Since then, the family -- two parents and two children -- have been in six shelters in three boroughs. She has transferred to a new school six times during this 10-month period.
>
> Pamela has recently been evaluated for special education services on the basis of a suspected "learning disability" and was assigned to a program for learning disabled children. She was to begin attending a new school the following week -- her seventh school in 10 months.

According to Pamela's mother:

> "I think what she really needs is to stop going to a different school every month. She didn't have this learning disability before we lost our home. What she really needs is a permanent home and extra help with her reading and her math".

C. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Board of Education's Database

The New York City Board of Education's computerized database on homeless children, which includes 6,433 students who were homeless at some point between February and May, 1988, was used to examine the school attendance of students in temporary housing. When we compared the attendance of students in temporary housing with that of all New York City students as reported in the School Profile Data for 1987-1988,[78] we found that homeless children had poorer attendance at all levels in the system:

* The average attendance rate for homeless students in elementary school is 73.6% compared with 88.7% of all New York City elementary school students.

* The average attendance rate for homeless junior high school students is 63.6% compared with 85.5% of all New York City junior high school students.

* The average attendance rate for homeless high school students is 50.9% compared with 83.9% of all New York City high school students.

The citywide findings are mirrored in the attendance rates of students in Community School Districts 1, 2, and 15 -- the three districts with the largest concentration of children in temporary housing. For example, the attendance rate of homeless students in District 2 is 68% versus 90% for District 2 students overall. These findings are summarized in Table 13.

TABLE 13

School Attendance Profile of Children in Temporary Housing[1]

VARIABLE	N		n	AVERAGE RATE	CITYWIDE RATE[2]
Average Attendance Rates (BOE data)	6,142[3]	Elementary	4429	73.6	88.7
		Junior High	1108	63.6	85.5
		High School	605	50.9	83.9
Average District Attendance Rates (BOE data)	1,851	District 1	618	69.0	85.4
		2	801	67.6	89.5
		15	432	75.5	88.4

[1]Data from the New York City Board of Education database on Students in Temporary Housing.
[2]Citywide comparison data from New York City Board of Education School Profile Data, Office of Research and Evaluation.
[3]Excludes 118 students missing a grade code designation and 173 children enrolled in the Citywide Special Education Program.

Field-Based Survey Data

We asked parents about the school attendance of their children in three different ways: (1) attendance during the week prior to the interview; (2) attendance during the month prior to the interview; and (3) number of days lost when moved into current facility. Our findings are summarized in Table 14.

Attendance during the prior week: The number of reported days missed during the week prior to being interviewed ranged from perfect attendance to total absence. Specifically, 62% (241) reported perfect attendance and 6% (23) reported missing all five days. Overall, the average reported rate of attendance for children in kindergarten through grade 8 (352) was 83.6% and 83.5% for the 38 students in grades 9 through 12.

Reported rate of attendance during the prior week varied according to the particular facility in which students were being sheltered. Overall, the rate of attendance ranged from 73% at the Prospect Interfaith (a District 8 responsibility) to 91% at Catherine Street (a District 2 responsibility).

Attendance during the prior month: During the month prior to our interview, 26% (99) reported perfect attendance, while 5% (21) missed more than 10 days. Overall, students in kindergarten through 8th grade (352) were reported to have gone to school 83% of the time, and students in grades 9 through 12 (38) 80% of the time.

Number of days lost when moved into current facility: With each move into a different facility, precious time in school is lost. Thus, the greater the number of different facilities a child has been in, the lower his/her overall attendance rate. On average, children missed 5 days of school when they moved into their current facility: 35% (138) missed no days; 19% (74) missed 1-2 days; 23% (88) missed 3-5 days; and 20% (78) missed 10 days or more.

TABLE 14

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OF FIELD-BASED SURVEY STUDENTS

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Days Missed in Past Week	390	None	241	61.8
		1 day	74	19.0
		2 days	35	9.0
		3 - 5	40	10.3
Average Attendance Rate for Prior Week	390	K - Grade 8	38	83.6
		9 - 12	352	83.5
Average Attendance Rate for Each Facility during Prior Week	383[a]	Catherine Street(D2)	46	91.3
		Regent Hotel (D3)	34	90.3
		Harriet Tubman (D5)	30	85.3
		E. Third Street (D1)	53	85.3
		Hamilton Hotel (D6)	32	85.0
		Prince George (D1)	76	84.0
		Colonial Hotel (D28)	23	81.7
		Saratoga (D29)	36	76.7
		Allerton Hotel (D2)	22	76.4
		Prospect I-Faith (D8)	31	72.9
Days Missed in Past Month	388	None	99	25.5
		1 - 5 days	212	54.6
		6 - 10 days	56	14.4
		11 - 20 days	21	5.4
Average Attendance Rate - Prior month	390	K - Grade 8	38	83.3
		9 - 12	352	80.2
Days Missed When Moved Into Current Shelter/Hotel	388	None	138	35.4
		1 - 2	74	18.9
		3 - 5	88	22.5
		6 - 9	10	2.6
		10 - 15	55	14.3
		16 - 25	23	6.0
Percentage of Children Who Missed More than One Week When Moved Into Current Facility	383[a]	Colonial(D28)		47.8
		Allerton(D2)		40.9
		Harriet Tubman(D5)		33.3
		Prospect(D8)		29.1
		Regent(D3)		20.5
		Saratoga(D29)		19.4
		Hamilton(D6)		18.7
		Prince George(D1)		17.6
		Catherine Street(D2)		15.2
		East Third(D1)		13.2

Note: N varies due to missing data.
[a] Families from shelters with n=1 are excluded.

The number of days missed also varied by the facility into which the family had moved. For example, the percentage of children who missed six days or more ranged from 13% at the East Third Street Shelter (a District 1 responsibility) to 48% at the Colonial Hotel (a District 28 responsibility).

These findings indicate that school attendance is negatively influenced by moving into a temporary facility. Thus, the more often a family is bounced around the system, the greater the likelihood of school time being lost. One important factor moderating the amount of time lost is the particular facility into which the family is being moved. Our results indicate that, of the facilities our respondents lived in, those in the Colonial Hotel in Queens (District 28) and the Allerton Hotel in Manhattan (District 2) reported the longest delays in returning to school. Neither of these facilities has Board of Education personnel on-site to assist families register their children in school. Perhaps because of the lack of on-site personnel, children at these sites are more likely to "fall between the cracks" in an already cumbersome and tenuous system.

Surprisingly, attendance rates reported by parents in our field-based survey did not reveal the sharp differences from permanently housed students obtained in the Board of Education's analysis of more objective data. For example, the Board's data show a 51% average attendance rate for homeless high school students, while the parents we interviewed reported that their high school children had attended school 80% of the time during the past month. This finding, we believe, may be explained by some observations made by our interviewers.

Interviewers frequently commented on the irony of parents reporting that their child, who was present with them while being interviewed during school hours, had perfect school attendance during the prior month. In many cases, parents commented that this was "the

first day their child had missed school in months." Given the possible consequences of candor and honesty in the present system, this is understandable. The major potential consequence which mitigates against full parental disclosure is their often mentioned fear of being unjustly charged with neglect, leading to the forcible removal of their children into foster care. Some parents, in fact, discussed how upsetting it was for them to be quizzed so frequently by caseworkers suspicious of their parenting ability because they were homeless. This tendency to "blame the victim" was possibly related to interviewers having to constantly reassure parents that we were not representatives of the City and that their individual responses would be confidential.

D. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

In order to determine whether homelessness compromises the education of children, we looked at three indices of academic performance: (1) reading achievement;* (2) mathematics achievement; and (3) holdover rates. Each of these indices is evaluated using data from the New York City Board of Education which utilizes information from their database of 9,659 school-age children living in temporary housing between September 1987 and May 1988. Wherever possible, findings are compared with similar data for all New York City students** through analysis of the Board of Education's Office of Educational Assessment Citywide test results[79] or their Promotion Analysis Report.[80] A second measure of academic performance from our field-based survey is used to evaluate reported holdover rates.

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* It could be argued that focusing on standardized tests does not adequately represent the true ability of students. While we agree that this is a possibility, alternative achievement measures were not available.

** A more adequate comparison would be to match homeless and housed children by select variable (e.g. age, grade, gender, school, etc.) However this data was not available.

Reading Achievement

The Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test is given every Spring to New York City students in grades 3 through 10. The reading achievement of all 3,805 students in temporary housing who took the DRP test in May, 1988, are presented in Table 15. The majority, 57.7% (2,195), scored below grade level, while 42.3% (1,610) scored at or above grade level*. In contrast, 68.1% of all New York City students,[81] who took the DRP test in May, 1988, scored at or above grade level.[82]

The findings for District 1, 2, and 15 (the districts serving the greatest numbers of homeless students), are consistent with the citywide findings. Overall, 36% (89) of students in temporary housing (for whom scores are available) in District 1 schools scored at or above grade level compared with 57.4% for all District 1 students. Similar findings are reported for District 2 schools where only 39.6% scored at or above grade level compared with 73.9% overall, and District 15 where only 40.7% scored at or above grade level compared with 67.5% overall.

Mathematics Achievement

The Citywide mathematics testing program uses the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) to assess achievement in mathematics in grades 2 through 8. Of the 5,174 students in

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* Somewhat perplexing is our finding that although there were 4,839 students in the Board's database in grades 3 through 10 in the Spring of 1988, all of whom would be expected to take the DRP test, 1,034 (21%) of these were either not tested or did not have reported scores listed. We were unable to determine the cause of these differences. In contrast, during the same term, only 12% of all New York City children who were supposed to take the DRP did not take it.

TABLE 15

Reading Achievement of Students in Temporary Housing

VARIABLE	Homeless Children[1] N		n	%	Citywide[2] %
Overall DRP Scores on May 1988 Test	3,805	Below grade level	2195	57.7	31.9
		At or above	1610	42.3	68.1
District 1	247	Below grade level	158	64.0	42.6
		At or above	89	36.0	57.4
District 2	402	Below grade level	243	60.4	26.1
		At or above	159	39.6	73.9
District 15	204	Below grade level	121	59.3	32.5
		At or above	83	40.7	67.5

[1]Data from the New York City Board of Education database on Students in Temporary Housing.
[2]Citywide comparison data from the New York City Board of Education Citywide Test Results.

the Board's database on pupils in temporary housing in grades 2 though 8 in the spring of 1988, MAT scores are available for 4,203 students (81%).*

As shown in Table 16, of the 4,203 students living in temporary housing who took the MAT in 1988, only 28.1% (1,182) scored at or above grade level and 71.9% (4,203) scored below grade level. In contrast, 56.7% of all New York City students who took the same test scored at or above grade level.

As they were in reading, the math scores in District 1, 2, and 15 are consistent with those reported citywide: 21.6% of the students in temporary housing who took the test in District 1 schools scored at or above grade level compared with 48.5% of all District 1 students who took the test. The findings for District 2 and 15 are even more dramatic (23.9% vs. 69.8% for District 2, and 23.4% vs. 59.8% for District 15).

Holdover Rates

The rate at which homeless students are promoted or held back at grade level was examined using Board of Education data as well as data obtained from our field based interviews. The Board's analysis is based on 8,070 students from their database.** As shown in Table 17, 54% (4,327) of the students in temporary housing are in an age appropriate grade; and 11.6% (938) are at least 2 years over age for their grade.

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* As with the reading scores, we were unable to ascertain the reason that no scores were reported for 971 (19%) students. In contrast, approximately 12% of New York City students, in general, do not have scores available.

** The data base includes 9,659 students. However, special education students who are not mainstreamed (1,050) and those students on file who are missing a grade code (539) are excluded from this analysis.

TABLE 16

Mathematics Achievement of Students in Temporary Housing

VARIABLE	Homeless Children[1] N		n	%	City-wide[2] %
Overall MAT Scores on May 1988 Test	4,203	Below grade level	3021	71.9	43.5
		At or above	1182	28.1	56.7
District 1	296	Below grade level	232	78.4	51.5
		At or above	64	21.6	48.5
District 2	480	Below grade level	365	76.0	30.2
		At or above	115	23.9	69.8
District 15	261	Below grade level	200	76.6	40.2
		At or above	61	23.4	59.8

[1]Data from the New York City Board of Education database on Students in Temporary Housing.
[2]Citywide comparison data from the New York City Board of Education Citywide Test Results.

TABLE 17

Holdover Rates of Students in Temporary Housing

VARIABLE	N		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Grade Level by Age (BOE data)	8,070[1]	2 yrs or more[2]	938	11.6
		1 yr over age	2443	30.3
		Proper age for grade	4327	53.6
		1 yr below age	362	4.5
Grade Level by Age (AFC data)	390[3]	2 yrs or more	44	11.3
		1 yr over age	143	36.7
		Proper age for grade	187	47.9
		1 yr below age	16	4.1
Currently Repeating Prior Grade	390	Yes	59	15.2
		No	331	84.9

[1]Data from the New York City Board of Education database on Students in Temporary Housing.
[2]Two years or more over age for grade.
[3]Data from families in AFC study.

Our findings from the field-based data are almost identical to those obtained from the Board's analysis -- 48% (187) of the children in our sample are in an age-appropriate grade, while 11.3% (44) are 2 years or more over age for their grade.

A second indicator of holdover rates was obtained from our field based data. Parents participating in our study reported that 15% (59) of the children are currently repeating a grade. This overall percentage, however, varies depending on the child's grade level. Of the 125 children in kindergarten through grade 2, 20% (25) are currently repeating a grade, compared to 14% (25) of the 173 children in grades 3 through 6, and 9% (5) of the 54 children in grades 7 and 8.*

While there is no citywide comparison data for housed children, findings from the New York City Board of Education Promotion Analysis Report[83] indicates that 6.8% of children in regular education were held over a grade at the end of the 1987-1988 school year. This suggests that the percentage of homeless children currently repeating a grade exceeds the percentage in the overall population.

E. THE AVAILABILITY OF SPECIAL SERVICES

Families participating in our field-based study were asked whether their children were now receiving or had previously received supportive or special school-based services. We focused on four different types of special services: (1) after-school programs; (2) gifted programs; (3) bilingual or English as a Second Language instruction; and (4) special help in reading or mathematics.

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* High school students are excluded from this analysis since they are not "promoted" in the same manner as elementary and junior high school students. Since they must, instead, accumulate a certain number of credits in order to graduate, there is generally some confusion over exactly what grade they are really in.

After-School Programs

Less than half of the children (176) in our study are enrolled in after-school programs (45%). Of those not enrolled (214), 96 report that none was available, and 118 choose not to attend available programs for a variety of reasons, most centered around the following themes:

* DISTANCE: "He goes to his former school in the Bronx and would get back to the shelter too late if he stayed for the after-school program."

* STIGMA: "The other kids don't treat the children from the shelter nicely...they pick on them, and call them 'the shelter kids' or 'the homeless kids' and she doesn't like that."

* DISSATISFACTION: "She won't go -- said it's too boring there."

  "They are not taught anything there. They just run around."

The availability of after-school programs was related to several factors, including type of facility, grade level, and facility.

* After-school programs were not available for 31% (32) of the 102 children in Tier 1 shelters; 28% (28) of the 99 children in Tier II shelters; and 19% (36) of the 189 children in commercial hotels.

* After-school programs were most likely to be available for children in grades 1 or 2 (83%) and least available for those in grades 9 - 12 (55%).

* After-school programs were most likely to be available for children from the Colonial Hotel in District 28 (100%), the Catherine Street Shelter in District 2 (90%), the Allerton Hotel in District 2 (88%), and the Prince George Hotel in District 1 (86%).*

* After-school programs were least likely to be available for children from the East Third Street Shelter in District 1 (64%), the Saratoga Shelter in District 29 (67%), and the Regent Hotel in District 3 (68%).

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* This analysis is based only on the 352 students in grades K through 8, since students in grades 9 - 12 are less likely to have services available to them.

In summary, parents in Tier I and Tier II shelters were less likely than parents in hotels to report that after-school programs were available for their children to attend. They were also less likely to be available for older children - those most at risk for poor attendance and dropping out. Finally, parents located in particular facilities located in Community School Districts 1, 2, and 28 were more likely to report the availability of services.

The higher reported unavailability of programs for children in Tier I shelters (particularly the East Third Street Shelter) may be related to the higher percentage of Tier I students who remain in their former school (34%). These students, in turn, are unable to participate in the "expanded services" offered by Districts 1 and 2 to students who attend school in these districts. It is also possible that additional outreach is needed to families in the Tier I facilities to increase their awareness of available services for their children.

Gifted Programs

* Of the 20 children who were in a gifted program prior to loss of permanent housing, only 6 (30%) are in one now.

Bilingual Classes or English as a Second Language

* Only 13 of our sample of 390 children had been in a bilingual class or received ESL services prior to becoming homeless. Of these, seven (54%) are currently being served.

Special Help in Reading or Mathematics

* Of the 64 non-special education students who were receiving reading or math remediation services prior to becoming homeless, only 39 (61%) receive them now.

F. SUMMARY

Under the best of circumstances, the process of being educated presents a challenge. For homeless children, the challenge is greater and more difficult. This occurs, in part, because families entering the emergency housing system are placed in temporary facilities

without consideration to the educational needs of the children and to the impact of being moved to unfamiliar and often distant communities. In fact, the majority of homeless families typically report that the loss of their home is compounded by displacement from their borough and community of origin. Overall, 71% (174) of the families interviewed in our field-based study who lived in New York before becoming homeless are in "temporary" housing facilities in a different borough than their last permanent home.

Further compounding the disruption in their lives is the considerable bouncing of families from one facility to another, and often from one borough to another. Overall, 66% (182) of the 277 families interviewed had been in at least two shelters; 29% (80) had been in at least four; and 10% (27) had been in seven or more. Bouncing from shelter to shelter was associated with length of time in the shelter system -- 26% of those in the system for six months or less had been in at least three different facilities, compared to 66% of those in the system for more than two years.

Because the Human Resources Administration places families without regard to community ties, most children transfer to a different school on becoming homeless. Indeed, 76% (290) of the 390 children in our field-based study transferred to a different school at least once since the onset of homelessness, and 33% (128) of the children had transferred schools two to six times. We also found that bouncing between facilities translated into more frequent school transitions, significantly hindering children's continuity of education.

The transition from one school to another is a stressful experience for children.[84] Yet, homeless children are routinely bounced between facilities and from school to school, requiring them to continually readjust to new environments and schools. In addition to the detrimental effects on their academic growth, their ability to make friends and maintain social relationships with classmates is severely disrupted.

While some progress has been made at the legislative and policy levels, many parents are still not informed of their choices regarding the educational placement of their children. Indeed, the parents of 119 of the 363 children (33%) who should have had the choice of whether their children would attend their local or former schools were never informed of their right to choose. Overall, 58% (142) of the 244 children whose parents had been given a choice were attending the local school, compared to 100% of the 119 children whose parents had not been given a choice.

Particularly disturbing is our finding that some parents were unaware that their children would receive free transportation passes if they continued to attend their former school. Many parents were also unaware of the existence of income maintenance procedures concerning carfare allowance for parents to escort their children to and from school. In fact, 53% (75) of the 142 children who had been transferred to the local school, despite their parent being offered a choice, were transferred because their parent could not afford the transportation costs and were not aware that the Board of Education and/or Human Resources Administration would cover these expenses.

Given these obstacles and disruptions, it was not surprising to find school attendance suffering. While the majority of homeless students are currently enrolled in school, their attendance is often erratic. This was demonstrated by Board of Education data which revealed an attendance rate in elementary school of only 74% (vs. 89% citywide), 64% for junior high school (vs. 85% citywide), and 51% for high school (vs. 84% citywide).

Unfortunately, efforts to improve the attendance of homeless children are undermined by the Human Resources Administration's policy of bouncing families from one facility to another. With each transfer to a new shelter or hotel, valuable time is lost. Data obtained from the families in our field-based study indicate that students missed, on average, five days

in school when they moved into their current facility. Overall, 19% (74) missed 1-2 days, 23% (88) missed 3-5 days, and 20% (78) missed 10 days or more.

Academic performance is also affected by homelessness, as demonstrated by our findings that only 43% of homeless students were reading at or above grade level, compared with 68% of students citywide. Similarly, only 28% of homeless students scored at or above grade level on mathematics ability compared with 57% citywide. Given these findings, it is not surprising that 15% of our survey respondents were currently repeating their prior grade and that 12% of homeless students in the Board of Education database were two years or more over age for their grade. In contrast, 7% of New York City students were held over at the end of the 1987-1988 school year. The excessive rate of holdovers among homeless children will, no doubt, have its repercussions. Being held over is generally traumatic for children and repeating a grade rarely improves academic performance. In fact, research has demonstrated that students who are over-age for their grade are more likely than other students to eventually drop out before completing high school.[85]

VII. DISCUSSION

The disruption from community and the subsequent events associated with the loss of a real home make the continuity of education a difficult and sometimes impossible task. The research which has been reviewed here, along with AFC's findings from the Board of Education's database analyses and our own field based research, link the removal of families from their homes, communities, neighbors, friends, services and schools to poorer nutrition, inadequate health care, more frequent illness, higher incidence of developmental delays, emotional problems, poorer school attendance, and academic under achievement. Since the problems associated with homelessness have only recently being recognized, only the short-term consequences have been examined. The longer-term effects will not be known with any surety for years to come.

The conditions in temporary housing facilities create extraordinary hazards for children, especially for those families warehoused in shelters or seedy hotels for long periods of time. Because cooking facilities are rarely available and families have insufficient money to buy food, children are often hungry, weak, and malnourished. When they come to school hungry, they have a hard time paying attention to school work. Their ability to concentrate is often further compromised by sleep disturbances: homeless children often spend nights of interrupted sleep, frequently translating into poorer school attendance or lack of concentration for those who do go to school. Cramped quarters, noise, and lack of privacy in shelters and hotels makes quiet study space an unknown commodity for most children.

In order for children to succeed in school, they need to have a permanent home. Our overriding recommendations, therefore, are to move quickly and dramatically to increase the availability of low-income and affordable housing; decrease the current one-year mandatory

wait before homeless families are eligible for relocation to permanent housing; and expand existing programs and services -- including advocacy and legal representation -- to prevent families from losing their homes.

Our second set of recommendations pertains to the short-term needs of homeless families in temporary shelters and is aimed at improving school experiences for the children. To this end, we urge that the Human Resources Administration be prohibited from placing families with children in congregate shelters or short-stay hotels. These facilities provide neither humane nor acceptable shelter for families. The only temporary shelter environment which is suitable for families with children are transitional apartments.

The city must establish policies and practices which maintain families in or near their own communities upon becoming homeless in order to minimize family disruption and maximize continuity in the children's education. Furthermore, the Human Resources Administration must be prohibited from moving families from one facility to another during the school year, except at their request or with their consent. Finally, programs must be established and/or expanded on that would address the needs of homeless students. Of particular concern are the nutritional, health, developmental, and educational needs. Specific recommendations to address these needs are outlined in a separate section at the beginning of this report.

Our final recommendations pertain to providing the resources and supports needed by families as they move out of the emergency housing system into permanent housing. Moving into a new apartment can be extremely stressful, even for families who have not been homeless. Drastic changes need to be made: new neighborhoods need to be explored; relationships with neighbors need to be developed; health care providers need to be identified; community schools need to be located and new teachers met. For families who

have been homeless, the stressors are often compounded by the discontinuation of support services which were available to them -- perhaps for the first time -- in the shelters and hotels in which they lived.

When homeless families move into permanent housing, they once again experience a significant disruption in their lives. Many will move to a different borough, not necessarily where their former permanent home was located. Educational services are again disrupted. Children must be enrolled in new schools, records must be transferred, and transportation to these new schools arranged. For special education students, the obstacles are likely to be greater.

In order to support families and help them to succeed at living in their new communities, we view the continuity of services as an essential and critical component of this process. Our specific recommendations (see p.11) are designed to ensure the continuity of educational services and the coordination of assistance so desperately needed by these children. If relocated students receive the necessary resources and support to successfully navigate this transition, detrimental impacts may be averted.

LOOKING BACK AT THE HOTEL

My memories aren't pleasant.
It was an experience.
My baby was just two
when we came.

She slept with me.
I had three ahead of her.
They slept in the other room.
We had two rooms.

It was two days before New Year's.
It was cold.
There wasn't any snow on the ground.
Christmas with bells.

I had a lot of beds,
my rooms in the hotel
were much smaller than
my eight room apartment.

I had mixed feelings.
We all got
out of the fire
safely--

They said the fire was set
from the roof.
I had hate
for the person who did it.

Scared, 'cause my cousin
was with me. I felt sad
for the kids 'cause
they lost all their toys.

I said, "Mommy will get more toys
when we get a new place."

Barbara Palmer

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